

HIS OWN PEOPLE ..



LEON W. ROGERS

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HIS OWN PEOPLE

BY LEON W. ROGERS



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LEON W. ROGERS

This book paints a vivid picture of the life of a Circuit Rider's family, and presents the problems of a boy growing to manhood under the strict discipline of a fundamentalist home.

Born at Groesbeck, Texas, in 1883, himself the son of a Methodist Circuit Rider—"Shoutin'" to quote the book—he has given us the story of the hard life of a grand man in a hard day past; and of his son, whose life, in comparatively modern times, was just as hard—although from other causes—until he found the underlying reason for his father's strength and perseverance.

None of the characters in the book are portraits of actual persons, nor has the name of any person actually connected with the events of the story been used.

The Publishers.



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MY MOTHER
AND
THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER

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CHAPTER 1

HELLO PREACHER!

I

ON the rickety front steps of the little, weather-beaten parsonage in the village of Elliston, sat a small boy. It was a bright, beautiful morning in late autumn, but Paul Wesley Polk was utterly oblivious to the warm sunshine that flooded the porch and warmed the crisp November air. Chin in cupped hands, elbows resting upon his knees, he sat motionless, staring at the summit of a fringe of low hills that limited the horizon.

Beyond those hills, one hundred miles away, was Bentonville, where he had lived for the past two years. Just yesterday, perched upon the high seat of one of the two wagons loaded with the Polk family's household goods, he had crossed those hills, and had eagerly sought a first glimpse of his new home. But this morning, unshed tears dimmed his eyes as he gazed out into the blue distance toward his old home.

All around him was a scene of confusion. On the porch, in the house, and even out in the yard were trunks, crated furniture, boxes, rolls of bedding, and chairs, whose backs and legs were still wrapped in old newspapers and discarded articles of clothing—stacked against the walls or piled indiscriminately upon each other, just as they had been unloaded from the wagons.

Out in the yard, some chickens just released from their coops, walked stiffly about, investigating their new premises, and half-heartedly searching for food.

Suddenly there rang out on the clear morning air the harsh peals of a bell. It was the first bell, imperiously warning tardily inclined subjects of Professor Hardcastle's little kingdom. To assert that on this particular morning the professor put an extra note of imperiousness into his pealing summons or that, in response to his energetic tugs at the rope, the bell sounded forth a more ominous threat than it usually carried in its iron tongue, would doubtless be an unjust charge. But to Paul Wesley Polk every peal had a peculiar note of malignity. Every stroke of the clapper, upon the rust-pitted sides of the old school bell, was a personal threat.

To the four or fivescore boys and girls who made up the Elliston public school it was only the first bell, a conventional warning against dilatory preparation for school; but to Paul Wesley it was much more than that. It was a challenge to the newcomer, the preacher's boy, to submit himself to the critical inspection of a new school, and possibly, if not probably, to fight his way across the threshold of a new boyhood world. He hated the sound of that bell, and he would have stopped up his ears with his fingers to keep it out, but he felt that that would be babyish; he knew too that he could not by that means blot out the things that the sound represented.

The last notes of the bell died away, but Paul Wesley did not stir from his place on the front porch. Hunching his knees up closer to him, he settled down, as if he intended to stay there indefinitely. Indeed, he was in no hurry to respond to Professor Hardcastle's summons.

Inside the house a baby cried fretfully; but no heed was paid to its complaints. The mother was too busy—trying to get the older children off to school on time. Already they had lost a week of school and she was unwilling for them to miss another day.

The task that confronted her was no easy one. Books, report cards, clothing—everything needed by the children—had to be found. A bureau must be dragged out of the corner and turned around so that its tightly packed drawers could be pulled out. In the bottom of one of those drawers was little Lucy's best school dress; and in any one of the trunks and boxes which were scattered all the way from the front porch to the lean-to in the rear, or even out in the yard, were other articles needed by the children. But, in spite of the confusion, and with a certainty and efficiency born of experience, she was able to find everything necessary for their first day in school.

"Paul Wesley, are you ready?" his mother called to him.

"Yes'm."

"Have you got all your books—and the report cards?"

"Yes'm."

To other questions as to the details of his preparation for his first day in Professor Hardcastle's school, which were called out to him as his mother darted from one room to another, and from house to yard and back again, Paul Wesley gave back affirmative but unenthusiastic replies. Indeed, the events of that school day, as he visioned them in the light of experience, were not such as to inspire boyish enthusiasm.

In a few minutes the younger children would be ready, and he would have to lead the way along the road—miscalled a street—that led up to the square and thence to the schoolhouse on the opposite side of town. It would be necessary for him to walk slowly, so that little brother could keep up, and yet he would have to see to it that the children were not tardy. It would not do for them to be late the first morning. That would make a bad impression on the school and community. A great deal, he realized, even then, was expected of the preacher's family.

On that road there would be other children on their way to school; the girls in little groups, giggling about the many things that make little girls giggle; the boys, straggling along in small groups, chasing each other here and there for one reason or another, chunking rocks at other boys or at nothing in particular, or leap-frogging it along the road.

Paul Wesley knew that he would not join those children in their play this morning. He knew too well that

when he and his little convoy came in sight all of those playful activities would cease. Oh yes, he could see what would happen, and hear the remarks occasioned by his appearance on the scene.

"Look! Here comes the new preacher's boy."

The girls would draw closer together, quiet for the instant; the chunking, chasing, and other games would be suspended momentarily while the newcomers were inspected. Then, as the groups of children resumed their schoolward way, someone would toss back over his shoulder the familiar taunt:

"Hello, preacher!"

That would serve to start them off. Then others, emboldened by the anonymity of the crowd, would take up the ragging.

"Hey, parson; where's your Bible?" That and other equally bitter shafts of ridicule would be hurled at him; while loud guffaws, snorts, slapping, and capering would evidence his tormentors' appreciation of their own witticisms.

And no defense would he have against the cruel attack—save only silence and a brave pretense of not hearing or disdaining to answer. One against the crowd—the odds against him—it would be futile and foolish to fight back. Besides, there would be his sister and little brother pressed closely against him for protection. He must remember his responsibility for them; he must see them safely enrolled in Professor Hardcastle's school.

II

Situated in the mid-western section of Texas, Elliston was typical of scores of small inland towns and villages scattered over the western half of the state in 1895. The day of the great cattle barons was passing, giving place to that of farmers and small ranchers. Few railroads had penetrated that section. Many counties had not a single mile of railway within their borders; what are now thriving, progressive, little cities—connected by rail to more populous centers—were, in those days, insignificant and isolated inland, county-site towns.

Not more than a dozen stores and business houses occupied the two built-up sides of Elliston Square. A barber shop, one or two blacksmith's shops, two doctors' offices, two or three real estate offices, all in small, frame buildings, were scattered promiscuously among the somewhat larger and more pretentious general stores.

In the center of the square stood the two-story, frame building which housed the county officials and represented the majesty of the law that was then struggling to supersede the unwritten law of the open range. The courthouse yard was unfenced, but along two sides of it extended a hitching rail. A similar convenience stood in front of the row of offices and stores. In the street, between the courthouse and business houses, stood the two-horse teams of farmers, and the four or six-mule teams of ranching outfits. Loosely tied to the hitching

rails or drifting about among the wagon teams and grazing on the dusty patches of short grass on the square were a number of cow-ponies, all carrying the familiar high cantled western saddles.

Lounging about the courthouse doors, in the yard, and in front of the stores were men and boys of many dissimilar types: farmers from east Texas and the older Southern States; tall, broad-shouldered, native stockmen; and cow-punchers from the neighboring cattle ranches, wearing high-crowned, wide-brimmed Stetsons and high-heeled boots, with long clanking spurs.

Three or fourscore dwelling houses, almost all of them one-story frame buildings, and most of them unpainted, made up the residential section. On opposite sides of town, in the center of large yards fenced in with tall, pointed palings, and surrounded by many evidences of the prosperity and business of their owners, stood two, large, two-story houses. In the rear of each were spacious corrals, barns and sheds. Binders, mowers, hay-baling machines, and many other agricultural implements stood under the sheds or in the open near the corrals and barns. One of the places was the home of "Colonel" Keener; the other was that of "Captain" Bennett.

Both the "colonel" and the "captain" were ranchmen, who owned thousands of acres of land and large herds of cattle. In the early days of the open range, they had largely controlled the country around Elliston. Each had consolidated his holdings, fenced his

land—and much that was not his by legal right, according to the gossip of the town—built a comfortable home in town, and settled down there with his family.

Colonel Keener was a Methodist, the chairman of the Elliston board of stewards, and to all intents and purposes the overlord of the Elliston circuit. And as the charge depended upon him for a great part of its financial support, he practically dictated its official policy and determined the tenure of the pastorate of its preachers. Captain Bennett was the most substantial pillar in the Baptist Church; he was, in fact, to his church all that "Brother Keener" was to the Methodist organization. Their families were rivals and were the leaders in the limited social life of the little town, as the two men themselves had always been in business affairs.

The school building was located about a quarter of a mile from the town square. Originally a one-room structure, it was now a three-room building. The third and last room was new, and as yet unpainted. A small cupola adorned the older portion of the building. There was hung the school bell, from which a rope dangled through a hole in the ceiling directly above Professor Hardcastle's desk. The unfenced school grounds were wide and extended. The land did not belong to the school district, but by common consent and the complaisance of the non-resident owner it was occupied by the school.

Three persons made up the faculty. First, there was

the principal, or rather the professor, William Seneca Hardcastle, small in stature, slightly bald, and with a high-pitched, rather squeaky voice. Second in command of the Elliston educational forces was Professor Overton. In marked contrast to his superior officer, he was tall, stooped, angular, a cross between the native western type and the backwoodsman of the "piney-woods" section of the state. He was habitually slow in motion and speech, and, except when his enthusiasm was aroused, he spoke with a pronounced drawl. The man was genuine and likeable. Just out of college, he was teaching school to earn money for a law course in the State University. "Miss Mary" was the third member of the triumvirate. She was really Mrs. Hardcastle, but for many years before she became Mrs. Hardcastle she had been "Miss Mary" to the people of the little town, and "Miss Mary" she still remained when Paul Wesley made his appearance in Elliston.

III

After a brief examination by the Elliston principal, Paul Wesley was assigned to Professor Overton's room, with instructions to report to Professor Hardcastle for his Latin and algebra. Professor Overton greeted the new pupil cordially, and then assigned him to a seat with Johnnie Wilson.

Paul Wesley was very much pleased; his reception had been much more pleasant than he had expected. He liked Professor Overton, whose cordial "I'm glad

to meet you, young man" was in marked contrast to "You are the new preacher's boy, are you not?" Then to have as a desk mate Johnnie Wilson, the one Elliston boy with whom he was already on a friendly footing, was, indeed, good fortune. His acquaintance with Johnnie Wilson dated back to the afternoon of the previous day, when his father had stopped at the Wilson home, on the outskirts of town, to inquire the way to the parsonage, and Johnnie had been sent off to pilot the pastor and his family to their new home.

The morning and noon recesses passed off without any exceptionally unpleasant experiences. Under Johnnie Wilson's friendly patronage, the new scholar was beginning to feel at home. But at the afternoon recess the two boys became separated, each playing with different groups of pupils. Paul Wesley was playing marbles. He was down on his knees, eagerly awaiting his turn to shoot, when three of the larger boys from Professor Hardcastle's room came up.

"Hello, there preacher! What you think you're doin'?"

Paul Wesley ignored the challenge. He knew by experience that to make a reply would only bring on more of the same sort of plaguing and attract a still larger audience.

"Say, parson, Johnnie Wilson says he can lick you." To that also Paul Wesley made no reply.

"Say, you ain't 'fraid of him, are you?" another one

of the boys taunted, at the same time giving Paul Wesley a shove from behind with his foot.

"Here, you quit that!" Paul Wesley cried as he picked himself up and faced his tormentors. "I don't believe it. He didn't say it."

"Yes, he did too. Just a minute ago. Didn't he, Bill?"

"Sure, he did. Said he could lick you with one hand tied behind his back."

"Now, what you got to say? Scared of him, ain't you?"

"No, I'm not. He's a liar; he can't do it."

Paul Wesley certainly had no desire to provoke a fight with his one friend in the new school, and he realized that Johnnie Wilson had probably been bullied into making the remarks attributed to him; but he knew full well that he must meet squarely that initiatory test of his fitness for membership in the fraternity of Elliston boyhood. The rules of the game of school-boy life prescribed the proper response for him to make to that challenge of his courage.

After school that afternoon, behind an old barn, two hundred yards from the schoolhouse, they were pitted against each other. The word had been passed around that Johnnie Wilson and the new preacher's boy were going to fight it out. Most of the boys of the school were on hand, forming a circle around the combatants.

On guard, with clenched fists, they faced each other.

Paul Wesley felt very much alone and friendless. He had no backers to encourage him. The only friend he had made in Elliston was arrayed against him, ready to exact satisfaction for that "liar." The odds were against him; but he knew that he had to fight, that he must then and there return blow for blow, if he would have the respect and friendship of those who were now weighing him in the balance. That was school-boy law, as he had learned it on previous occasions.

"Called me a liar, didn't you?" demanded Johnnie Wilson who, as the representative of the Elliston honor, must teach this newcomer his proper place. "Goin' to take it back?"

"No; I'm not, and you can't make me either," Paul Wesley belligerently replied.

Then two right fists struck out; the fight was on. The boys were well matched; both fought to win. The one was fighting to preserve the respect and esteem of his fellows; the other to establish his right to belong to the little world represented by Johnnie Wilson and his partisan supporters.

What the outcome of the contest would have been will always be unknown, for suddenly, before either of the combatants gained any advantage over the other, Professor Hardcastle was discovered hurriedly approaching the scene of hostilities.

"Hardcastle! Yonder comes the 'fessor."

The ring of spectators broke up in dismay; the combatants released each other from the clinch into which

they had fallen, took one glance at the professor's menacing figure, and, side by side, took to their heels.

In a very few minutes the two boys placed a safe distance between themselves and the pursuing school head. So far as he was concerned they were safe—for the present. They experienced a feeling of exultation, and were inclined to be a little boastful as they proceeded homeward at their usual pace. No further reference to their recent quarrel was made by either of them. That was already ancient history; their friendship, in the face of a common danger, was sealed.

At the square the boys separated, and Paul Wesley was left to make the remainder of the way home alone. At once his spirits fell. It was one thing to show his heels to the schoolmaster and derisively to challenge the thunderbolts of an outraged school autocrat; but it was quite another thing to enter a Methodist parsonage with tell-tale marks of recent physical combat upon his boyish features, and that on the first day of school in the new place.

The professor's wrath would have to be appeased on the morrow; but the whipping that was certain to follow his reappearance at school he did not seriously mind. To be soundly whipped by Professor Hardcastle for fighting, however painful it might be at the moment, would seal his membership in the brotherhood of Elliston boyhood. And those red marks and bluish splotches on his face he would cherish tomorrow as honorable scars of battle; but tonight he must wear

them as evidence of his disgraceful conduct. He quailed before the prospect of exhibiting those badges of shame in the presence of his minister-father.

IV

For his misconduct Paul Wesley expected to be arraigned before the bar of a scandalized church membership who would consider his offense much worse than that of Johnnie Wilson. The incident would, he felt certain, be exaggerated and charged up against the pastor and his family at the outset of his new work. And in this he was not mistaken. Indeed, at that very moment, the Elliston verdict on his offense and, also, on the pastor's responsibility for the "scandalous conduct" of his son was being pronounced in more than one home.

"Well, sakes alive! What was he fighting Johnnie Wilson for?" Mrs. Smith wanted to know when her little Mary reported that the new preacher's boy and Johnnie Wilson had a fight on the way home from school.

"I don't know—exactly; but Bob Turner said he called Johnnie a bad name, and Johnnie was going to make him take it back or lick him—I guess that was it," Mary replied. "And he just started to school this morning," she added, enlarging upon the enormity of the new pupil's offense.

"It looks mighty strange to me that he would start right in the very first day calling other children bad

names—and him a preacher's son, too," Mrs. Smith observed.

And just across the street from the parsonage, Sister Jones, the wife of the Sunday School superintendent, commenting on her Susie's report of Paul Wesley's advent into the Elliston school, was declaring to Sister Thompson: "It looks like a preacher's boy would know better than to go 'round calling children bad names like that. But then they do say preachers' children are the worst of all."

"Well, all I've got to say is that Brother Polk had better start in right now and teach that boy how to behave himself," replied Sister Thompson. "The *idea* of him calling a boy he'd never seen but a few minutes before a bad name and jumping on him like that!"

"—But, if his father won't make him behave himself, I hope Professor Hardcastle'll give him what he deserves tomorrow," Sister Thompson fervently declared, summing up the prosecution.

V

Paul Wesley and Johnnie Wilson arrived on the school grounds early the following morning. They were acutely conscious of the importance of the rôles they were expected to play. Inwardly each was rather nervous and fearful of the impending interview with Professor Hardcastle, but outwardly they appeared utterly indifferent to, and even scornful of, the consequences of their escapade.

"Gosh a'mighty! I wouldn't be in you guys' places this mornin' for anything," declared one of the group of boys surrounding the victims-to-be of the professor's avenging wrath. "Old Hardcastle'll sure put it on you, I bet."

"Better have on lots of clothes. I'd have on all the shirts and pants I got, if I was you," advised another member of the group.

"Shucks! I don't keer," boasted Johnnie Wilson. "Won't hurt no longer'n it lasts."

"Is that so? Bet he makes you cry just the same."

"Bet he don't. No teacher could make me cry, no matter how hard he licked me," Johnnie retorted.

The ringing of the bell for books brought the argument to a close. The boys filed into their rooms and took their seats. The room quickly settled down and all eyes were turned expectantly toward the door leading into Professor Hardcastle's room. They did not have long to wait. The professor's appearance was almost simultaneous with the entrance of the last pupil.

"I want to see Paul Wesley Polk and John Wilson in my room at once," he announced.

The two boys got up and followed the principal into his room. They walked steadily, but were not quite able to maintain the jaunty air of indifference that had characterized their earlier appearance.

"Have a seat there," the principal commanded, indicating a bench immediately in front of his desk.

With a quick, surreptitious glance around, the boys

sat down. All work was suspended in the room; the pupils were intent upon the little drama about to be enacted before them.

"I understand that you boys were fighting yesterday afternoon on the way home from school."

Neither of the culprits at the bar of the professor's court saw fit to speak out and affirm his guilt; but, as neither of them offered a denial of the charge on which they were arraigned, he evidently took it as a plea of guilt.

"What were you fighting about? What brought on the difficulty?" Professor Hardcastle demanded.

No answer from the occupants of the front bench. Each one was willing for the other to do all the necessary talking.

"What was it, John? I want the truth about it—mind you—right now," the professor snapped out, advancing a step toward Johnnie Wilson.

"I don't know—nothing much, 'fessor," Johnnie replied.

He no longer felt any resentment toward Paul Wesley, and his loyalty to school-boy standards of deportment made him hesitate to inform the schoolmaster of the epithet that Paul Wesley had applied to him.

"You mean to sit there and tell me you do not know what you were fighting about, that you weren't fighting about anything? Do you expect me to believe such nonsense?"

Professor Hardcastle was rapidly working himself

up to the pitch of feeling that would enable him to make a good job of the work at hand.

"Well, young man, you had better answer my question, and be quick about it or I'll teach you how——"

"Well, sir—Oh, well, he called me a bad name——"

The need for self-preservation in the face of the professor's menacing figure forced Johnnie to reveal the cause of the fight.

"Oh, I see, he called you a bad name, did he? Well, why didn't you say so at first?"

But before Johnnie could answer that question, the professor shot another one at him.

"What did he call you?" And as Johnnie hesitated to answer: "Well, out with it—what was it?"

"A liar."

"You heard what he said?" Professor Hardcastle demanded, turning to Paul Wesley.

"Yes—yes, sir."

"You mean you don't deny it—that you did call him a liar?"

"No, sir—yes, sir; I called him that, but——"

The professor did not appear to care to hear any explanations; he seemed to think that the evidence was all in. Turning around, he walked rapidly to the wall back of his desk, and from two large nails just above the blackboard he took down a handful of well-seasoned switches. Selecting the two that appealed to him as being the best adapted to his purpose, he replaced the others, turned and again faced the boys.

"I am surprised at you boys. Both of you ought to know better, especially you—er—Paul Wesley," he said, as he placed one of the switches on the table beside him. "Fighting and swearing are not tolerated in this school. You might as well learn that right now! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, your father being a minister of the Gospel and occupying the place he does in the community. You should have some respect for him, even if you have none for yourself."

Paul Wesley made no reply to Professor Hardcastle's statement of the charge against him, although he keenly resented the injustice of his being made to appear the principal offender in the case at bar.

"Well, at least, I'll teach you that you've got to respect my rules and behave yourself in this school. Step out here, young man! Pull off that coat!"

In the use of a switch Professor Hardcastle was no novice. As is the bow to the hand of an artist, so was a switch to his. And the present occasion was one worthy of his best skill. Rhythmically the well-seasoned, peach-tree switch swished through the still air of the attentive schoolroom, and fell with studied precision on Paul Wesley's coatless back. Amply fulfilled was Sister Smith's pious hope that Professor Hardcastle would give him "*all* that he deserved."

CHAPTER 2

FATHER AND SON

!

IN the big, family Bible that occupied the place of honor on the small center table in the front room of the little four-room parsonage where Paul Wesley was born, his name came next after those of his father and mother. *Paul Wesley Polk, born at Burnet, Texas, May 15th, 1885.* Thus the simple biographical record stood; but it revealed little of the hopes and ambitions that inspired and warmed the heart of the father who penned it.

That name—Paul Wesley—was not idly chosen, or at random. It was an expression of the faith and fondest desire of the minister-father for his first-born son. Paul was his own first name, chosen from the pages of Holy Writ by a mother, austere and even puritanical in her outlook upon life and its responsibilities, whose chief concern was to bring up her children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This name, with that of the revered founder of Methodism, he gave the boy whose birth was, he confidently believed, an answer to his prayers for a son who should follow in his own footsteps. Thus did he seal the boy's dedication to the cause to which his own life was devotedly consecrated.

Paul Wesley could never recall the time when he

did not realize that he was dedicated to the ministry. Indeed, it was impossible for him to escape that knowledge, for his dedication to the Lord was no less clearly marked than was that of the boy Samuel, of whom it was written: "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition . . . therefore also have I lent him to the Lord." From the very beginning he had been his father's preacher-boy. Thus had the father, in the quiet, happy comradeship of their little parsonage homes or when together they visited in the homes of Brother Polk's people, spoken of his little son. "Yes, he is papa's preacher-boy," he would fondly say, "and when he grows up he is going to be a preacher like his father, but a better one, I hope," he sometimes wistfully added, "one who will accomplish much more for the Kingdom than I can ever do." And then would Paul Wesley, in response to the note of pride and tender affection in the voice of his big, broad-shouldered father, draw himself up and smile back a child's glowing affirmation of words whose significance he but dimly comprehended. Yes, indeed, when he got to be a great big man, he was going to be a preacher, "just like papa."

II

The father of Paul Wesley was a striking figure. There was in his appearance none of the stooped, emaciated gauntness so commonly attributed to preachers of his type. He was a man of generous, even mas-

sive, physical proportions—six feet six in height, broad-shouldered, weighing well over two hundred pounds; and to the day of his death he was as erect as an Indian. Indeed, so different was he in appearance from the men who had preceded him on his various charges that the difference was the subject of frequent and admiring comment. "Brother Polk looks more like a rail-splitter than a preacher," was a homely comparison often employed to express admiration of the new pastor. And, in truth, his stalwart body and rugged strength were those of one whose youth and early manhood had known the hardships and unrequited toil of a backwoods farm in middle Tennessee. That was the hard, primitive mould in which was cast, also, the rugged independence of thought and character that would not bend with every wind of ecclesiastical or popular favor.

The presiding elders, whose Jove-like nods could place the stamp of favor and preferment on their preachers, never rated Brother Polk as a successful pastor. Nor was he. In his make-up were blended many of the qualities of the Puritan and of the Hebrew prophet. He was uncompromising; and he dwelt, for the most part, in a world far removed from the one in which pretentious church buildings, blasé choirs and conference collections played an important rôle.

He was, in fact, just an ordinary Methodist preacher; that is, *ordinary* in the sense that the church world appraises its preachers. The general features of his life and work differed little from those of hundreds, even

thousands, of preachers of his day. His appointments were, like theirs, struggling "half-stations," "circuits," and "starvation missions." His, too, were the ordinary duties and responsibilities of the itinerant: preaching the Word without fear or favor, baptizing, marrying, burying, holding revivals, struggling to get up the collections—including the presiding elder's pro rata—and striving to make one dollar go as far as two in the support of his family—and not infrequently failing to get the one dollar.

In many respects Brother Polk was a survivor of an earlier generation of men and preachers. His temperament and forms of thought were those of the fathers of the church. In moments of religious fervor and exaltation he suggested those Old Testament writers whom he was so fond of quoting and among whom, it seemed to Paul Wesley, he really lived. He was essentially a revivalist. A revival meeting called forth his best efforts as a preacher. On such occasions his sermons reached their highest pitch of eloquence and spiritual fervor. Standing on a low pine platform, under a rude brush arbor, in the midst of a great revival, with the flickering lights of kerosene torches playing on him, he appeared to tower above his congregation and to reflect the supernatural light of that other world that he so vividly described. Then it was not unusual for him to bring a sermon to an abrupt end with an indescribable shout of "Hallelujah! Glory to God in the Highest!" And that shout, caught up by

his hearers, unloosed all the pent-up emotions of the occasion. Then would penitents flock to the altar as the congregation shouted and sang "Come Thou fount of every blessing; tune our hearts to sing Thy praise," and the saints of the Lord, carried away on the wings of faith, looked over the battlements of Heaven itself and caught a glimpse of the Heavenly City of many mansions.

III

In marked contrast to the father was the mother of Paul Wesley. No casual observer would have taken her for a preacher's wife; much less would he have thought her to be the wife of Brother Polk, such was the disparity in their appearance—a disparity so striking, in the early years of their association especially, as to occasion no less discussion than did Brother Polk's unlikeness to his brethren.

"Why, she's young and pretty enough to be his daughter!" was, not infrequently, the pleased comment as Brother Polk, on the first Sunday morning of a new pastorate, walked down the aisle beside his shy little wife whose head, with its wealth of golden brown hair, scarcely came to his shoulder.

But not all of the comment evoked on such an occasion was complimentary. Disapproval of the new pastor's youthful helpmeet was no less frequently voiced than was admiration. "Yes, pretty enough; and young—too young for a preacher's wife," was often the

tight-lipped dissenting opinion of the front pews, emphasized by no little black-bonneted head shaking.

Young she was, and pretty when first she began the treadmill of the Methodist itinerancy, a way of life for which she was but little fitted by either nature or training. Only eighteen was she then, and he was thirty-five; but the disparity in their years and the even greater difference in their ways of life, which were so apparent to others, she saw not—or, seeing, gave little thought to their significance. Thus, when her friends protested: “Why, Edith Bruce, you’re not going to marry *him*, are you? A man *ever* so much older—*ages older*—than yourself!” she replied with a toss of her head, and archly wondered if they weren’t just a tiny, little bit jealous because the handsome young minister hadn’t asked them to ride home from the Sunday evening service in his shiny new buggy.

“But *Edith!*” they cried in amazement. “He’s a preacher—a circuit rider! Just think of marrying a Methodist circuit rider, even as handsome a one as your *young* Brother Polk—and of having to give up all your fun and be as meek and pious as Moses. And having to dress like old Brother Smith’s wife! You remember them, don’t you? He used to preach on Sunday afternoons in the little Methodist chapel down on the edge of your Grandfather Bruce’s plantation; and his wife, the poor old soul, looked as if everything she possessed had come out of a missionary box.”

But if Edith Bruce recalled the drooping figure of

old Brother Smith's wife in her best Sunday dress, shiny at the seams and stitch-worn from many turnings inside out and outside in, it was only for a moment. In her eyes then was no place for the pallid figures resurrected from the limbo of childhood days. The romantic present offered a more entrancing vision—the vision of a tall, stately figure whose coal black hair was just then becomingly streaked with gray and whose deep-set eyes lost their thoughtful seriousness and glowed with tenderness when they looked into her own.

After a brief courtship she was married to Brother Polk, and then, leaving behind the world of her birth and early childhood—a world whose foundations were the traditions of the Old South—she went with her minister-husband to Texas; and there, one year later, in the little town of Burnet, where the East and the West then met—and the West predominated—Paul Wesley was born.

Difficult, indeed, would the granddaughter of Colonel Hamilton Bruce have found it to adjust herself to the life of a Methodist parsonage even in her own land and in the midst of a people to whose spirit her own was akin. What then must have been her bewilderment when she found herself a bride of two months, facing the exacting duties and the unaccustomed responsibilities of a preacher's wife in a land whose turbulent, pioneer spirit terrified her! Of the perplexities and the heartaches of those early years of her itinerancy, a volume might be written. But not of all that is this the

story, but rather of the boy whose mother was Edith Bruce and whose father was Brother Polk.

IV

Not until the end of his childhood days did the life of Paul Wesley notably differ from that of the boys with whom he was associated; nor until then was his relationship to his father exceptional or the source of unhappy experiences. But at that point, somewhere on the dividing line between his childhood and early youth, Paul Wesley discovered that there was between himself and the sons of the men and women who made up the membership of his father's churches a sharply defined line; one which, at certain points, both he and they could, and did, cross, but nevertheless a clear-cut line of demarcation.

Other boys were, he unhappily discovered, merely their fathers' sons; but not so did Brother Polk's circuits know his son. They knew Paul Wesley and, with but rare exceptions, spoke of him either as "the preacher's boy" or "that boy of Brother Polk's." The choice of those two descriptive terms depended upon the nature of their comment. The one served the need of mere designation, but an expression of disapproval called for its scarcely less frequently used variant.

To Paul Wesley those descriptive tags were odious. Years afterward, with the dark shadows of Colonel Keener and Sister Thompson no longer lying across his pathway, Paul Wesley might concede that custom

rather than a malicious intent imposed those odious tags. At the age of ten he held no such charitable view of discriminatory labelling, a ten-year-old boy does not desire to appear different from other boys. He is conventional in the extreme; he wishes to look and act just like other boys. So it was, then, with Paul Wesley. The last thing he wanted was to be singled out from his fellows. But he could not escape; he was tagged—labelled. He was the preacher's boy.

The discovery of that unfortunate distinction between himself and other boys marked the turning point in Paul Wesley's relationship with his father. Thenceforth, father and son, going their separate and divergent ways, looked in vain for the frank, cordial companionship of their earlier association. Himself tagged and bracketed, so Paul Wesley found his father set off from the everyday world of men and affairs. He was Brother Polk—not unlike other men in all respects, but more the minister, the anointed representative of another world—and to associate with him one had to be dressed, both physically and mentally in his Sunday clothes. Thus the identity of the father was submerged in that of the minister, and the son saw his father, more and more, in the light of his professional, rather than his human, attributes. Nor should this appear strange. On the contrary, it would have been cause for wonder had the son been able to remain on a plane of frank companionship with the father whose person was obscured by the vestments of the Temple.

As the boy lost sight of the father, so did Brother Polk lose step with the son who in his early childhood days had fondly proclaimed himself to be his father's preacher-boy. No longer were the boy's interests confined within his little parsonage home; he was beginning to discover new interests and activities in the outside world. And beyond that point in the son's development the father's sympathetic interest could not go. There the penumbra of the minister enveloped the comradely father.

But never was Paul Wesley to forget his childhood's happy relationship with his father. Always two pictures stood out clearly in his memory. One was that of his father, his dignified professional air cast aside, down on all-fours, playing horsie with the little son whose childish imagination converted the father's suspenders into bridle reins as he rode his horsie around and around the room. The other picture was not so much one of his independent memory as it was of his mother's recital of the incident from which it arose. But it was one that Paul Wesley, especially as he grew older, cherished and would never forget. It was a picture of his father in a manly and heroic light, just as his boyish pride and affection would have always had him appear.

The incident occurred when Paul Wesley was only three years old. His father had driven out to a Sunday afternoon appointment, and Paul Wesley had gone along, as he often did. The father enjoyed keenly the company of his little son on such occasions, and nothing

gave the child more pleasure than to drive through the country behind his father's big buggy horse.

They were on their homeward way. Paul Wesley was holding the loose ends of the lines, pretending that he was driving. The horse, a gentle, thoroughly reliable animal that had never given his owner cause to distrust him, was trotting briskly along. Then, about half way down a long hill, at the foot of which was a deep, narrow, unbridged creek, it happened. Suddenly, and unaccountably the horse became frightened. He threw himself back on his haunches, reared and plunged forward in a wild runaway.

The father made a desperate but hopeless effort to regain the control that the animal's first, wild plunge had wrested from him. The frightened horse was only to be conquered after a long, hard fight. Now there were only a few seconds in which to avert a dangerous, and perhaps fatal, accident.

There was but one thing to do. Regardless of his own peril, he must save his boy. So he leaned far out over the wheels of the wildly careening vehicle and dropped the child to the ground. An instant later the buggy plunged over the steep bank into the creek where the driver was found—unconscious amid the wreckage. So serious was his condition that ultimate recovery was a question of long, dragging months.

As a child, Paul Wesley never tired of hearing his mother's account of that memorable event. The story cast his father in a glamorous, heroic light. In later

years, no matter how great the distance between them, the recollection of that heroic act was a challenge to Paul Wesley's filial affections and gratitude. It was one indissoluble bond between father and son.

CHAPTER 3

HELEN

I

AMONG the dozen or more pupils that Paul Wesley found in Professor Hardcastle's Latin class was Helen Thomas. And Helen was pretty—the prettiest little girl in Elliston it was generally conceded. In that opinion Paul Wesley promptly and enthusiastically concurred. Indeed, he went even farther than that in his appraisal of Helen's blue-eyed, doll-like prettiness. In the sphere of her dominance he included all the towns in which he had lived and all the little girls he had ever known.

But however pretty she was, Helen was not a bright pupil. In all of her classes Helen's accustomed place was the foot. She had little, if any, ambition to turn down anyone and take higher scholastic rank. So, at the foot of the Elliston Latin class, pretty, purring, with her long, black curls forever falling down around her face and having ever so often to be tossed back into place, Paul Wesley found her; and straightway fell head over heels in love.

A circumstance of ill omen for the new Latin scholar's progress was that. Indifferent, at best, toward his school work, and only kept up to the mark by his father's insistent coaching, Paul Wesley would not have shone

in Professor Hardcastle's Latin class even if his head had not been turned topsy-turvy by Helen's bewitching smiles. But as it was, he was doomed—at the foot of the class, accounted a poor scholar, but with the object of his youthful adoration, he stuck. To no avail Professor Hardcastle blustered and sarcastically bullied; in vain Brother Polk, who cherished the hope that through his son he might in a measure realize his own unfulfilled ambition to become a classical scholar, coaxed, plead, and even threatened. At the foot of the class was Helen; and there, too, Paul Wesley was content—nay, preferred—to stay.

And this notwithstanding he had only a short time before resolved to mend his unstudious ways and to reflect credit upon his father. That short lived resolution had been made at Bentonville, just before he moved away. On their way home from prayer meeting, Brother and Sister Polk had stopped for a visit with Professor Harper and his family. In Bentonville Professor Harper was reputed to be a great scholar. He had, according to the local tradition, been forced by failing health to give up a chair in a famous Eastern college and go West to live. For the scholarly principal Brother Polk had a great admiration, and he had at the first opportunity enrolled Paul Wesley in his Latin class.

"Come in and visit awhile," Professor Harper had insisted that evening. "I have some work to do—Latin papers to grade—but Mrs. Harper can talk to you while I work."

Mention of the Latin papers interested Brother Polk at once. He was eager to know what Paul Wesley had done on the examination. "What sort of mark did that boy of mine make?" he inquired, and when he was told that the paper had not yet been graded, he insisted that the professor grade it then.

Complying with his friend's request, Professor Harper looked over the paper and announced the result—sixty per cent. "The little rascal didn't half try," he added, apologetically. "He could have done much better than that."

When they got home, his parents found Paul Wesley apparently absorbed in his lessons for the next day. He had been included in the invitation to visit with the professor's family, as he had often done before, but tonight he had declined. "No, thank you; I guess I'd better run on home and get at my lessons," he had replied. He had no desire to be present should that Latin examination come up for discussion.

"By the way, son, Professor Harper graded your Latin paper while we were there," his father reported.

Paul Wesley evinced little interest in the report.

"You made a very low mark—only sixty per cent," his father went on. "I was disappointed; you should have done much better than that."

"Yes, sir; I know I should have," Paul Wesley admitted.

"But Professor Harper said he didn't half——," his

mother interposed, coming to his defense. "Maybe he'll do better next time, papa."

Paul Wesley felt very grateful to Professor Harper for having let him down so easily. He knew that the professor had graded his paper very liberally. He hadn't made as much as sixty per cent on the examination. And, heartily ashamed of himself, he resolved that he would study harder and never again give his father occasion for such embarrassment as he must have felt at Professor Harper's.

Not unchallenged was his idyllic place with Helen at the foot of the class. Harry Mason challenged it. To Harry, Paul Wesley's advent was wholly unwelcome. He considered the newcomer's frank preference for Helen's society a personal affront. At once the two boys became acknowledged rivals for the favor of the dullest, but prettiest, little girl in the Elliston school. What a triumph he scored, whenever one or the other of them won the coveted privilege of lookin' on her book! The number of times a book was left at home, or a lesson was torn out, to give the owner an excuse for sharing Helen's book—who can tell?

From this rivalry there could come but one issue; nor was it to be long delayed. But if Helen was conscious of the impending crisis, she gave no sign of it. On both boys she smiled in turn; and, with a coquetry far beyond her years, contrived to retain the old, while she annexed the new, admirer.

The climax came at a play party.

The announcement of a play party on a Friday night—parties on school nights were against the rules—was the signal for a lively scramble between Paul Wesley and Harry for the privilege of taking Helen. The successful one could not call at her home to accompany Helen to the party. Elliston children were not then permitted to do that sort of thing; but, starting off to a party, they first got together in small neighborhood groups. Once out of parental sight, however, the groups dissolved into couples.

On this particular occasion Paul Wesley had been the fortunate one and had taken Helen to the party. All of the invited guests had arrived, and it was time for the party to begin. "We are going to play 'Skip-to-My-Lou,'" the youthful hostess announced. "The boys will choose their partners." It was their favorite game, a singing game in which the players danced or skipped through certain simple figures as they sang the words of the play.

"I've got my partner," Paul Wesley announced confidently, as he dashed across the room to take his place beside Helen.

"Yes, you have!" Harry Mason jeered, thrusting himself belligerently between Paul Wesley and Helen. "You just think you've got a partner."

Preparations for the game ended at once. The players massed themselves in a close circle around Helen and the two contending rivals.

"All right, ask her—ask her whose partner she is, if you don't b'lieve me," Harry challenged, interrupting Paul Wesley's indignant protest.

In that challenge there was a convincing ring of assurance. It wasn't according to the rules for Harry to have Helen for the first game. The rules gave him that privilege, but there were, they said, exceptions to all rules, and, incredible as it seemed, this must be one. He glanced at Helen; and she, answering his unspoken question with a nod of her curly head, affirmed Harry's claim.

"Now, what you got to say?" Harry demanded triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you so?"

He had nothing to say. What, indeed, could he say in that moment of bitter humiliation? In the presence of that room full of children who had heard his confident announcement that he had a partner, what answer could he make to his victorious rival's exultant "Didn't I tell you so?" Silent, stunned, powerless to assert or defend his rights, he stood there.

"Come on, you all; let's begin playin'," someone called out.

"Yeah, come on; they ain't goin' to fight," was the disappointed reply, as the circle melted and preparation for the game was resumed.

A touch on the arm roused him. "Come on, Paul Wesley; don't you want to play?" a sympathetic voice inquired.

He shook his head. No, he did not want to play—

now or ever again. He was through with partners and parties forever. Without a word he turned and stalked out of the room. He was going home!

But at the front gate he stopped. His sister Lucy was in there. He couldn't go off and leave her to go home alone. No, he must wait; but he wouldn't go back in that room!

At the far end of the porch, in the dark, with his back against a post and his knees hunched up against his breast, he sat and waited. In front of him lay a patch of light across which flitted the shadows of the players as they danced past an open window. With his hands clasped around his legs and his chin pressed down between his knees, he watched those shadows and gave himself up to bitter reflections. Helen hadn't played the game fairly; she had no right to be Harry's partner in the first game. Hadn't he brought her to the party? Yes—he could see them, himself and Helen, on the way there, with her hand on his arm, pressed closely against his side. Behind them, discreetly spaced, were other children in intimate couples or companionable groups. He had looked forward to that walk with her, to the party itself and the intimate, slow-paced return. And on the way he had shyly offered his present, a paper sack of mixed candy—the candy purchased with a dime that he had earned by cutting an extra amount of stove wood for his mother and treasured for this occasion. And how pleased she had pretended to be. “Oh, goody! candy—chocolate caramels; I just

love 'em," she had exclaimed, giving his arm a little squeeze that sent ecstatic thrills all over him.

But all of that was over now. No more girls for him! He was through with them—for good and all. Let her have Harry Mason! Yes, if she still wanted him after he got through with him—tomorrow. Yes, sir, he'd make that young man pay!

II

If Paul Wesley got up the next morning as fully determined to square accounts with Harry Mason as he was when he went to bed, he was compelled by force of circumstances to let that affair wait. The immediate and inescapable business of Saturday morning was the family washing. In the western Texas of his childhood there were no negroes or any other servant class available for domestic employment. The weekly washing was, therefore, a family affair; each household must do its own work. This meant that the small boys of Elliston always had a previous engagement Saturday morning. Theirs was the double duty of hauling water and turning the washing machine.

Situated in a semi-arid region, Elliston was dependent upon a deep well on the outskirts of the village for its water supply. A windmill pumped the water into a large corrugated iron tank, from which it was hauled in barrels to the homes. While wagons and teams were sometimes used, the most common means employed for that purpose was a specially designed water cart. This

device consisted of a pair of old buggy wheels and a molasses or whiskey barrel suspended from an iron rod which passed through the barrel just above the middle and formed an axle for the cart, to which a pair of shafts was attached. In a few instances horses were used with the water carts, but as a rule the boys of the little town were expected to furnish the horsepower to supply their homes with water.

On this Saturday morning Paul Wesley had already made one trip to the well, and, with the assistance of his little brother, was making his laborious way a second time up the hill from the valley in which the well was located, when Harry Mason and Carl Foster appeared at the top of the hill on the way to the well with their water carts. Instantly Paul Wesley and Harry realized that the moment for settlement had come. Two water carts, released by their owners, rolled down hill and finally crashed into a ditch beside the road.

For a brief moment the two boys stood on guard, each one waiting for the other to make the first move. Harry was the first to attack. Down the hill he rushed, confident that the advantage of his position would enable him to rush Paul Wesley off his feet. And his sudden down-hill onslaught might have done that had it not abruptly and ignominiously ended by his tripping and falling right at the feet of his waiting antagonist. Paul Wesley, set and braced, was thrown off his balance when his fallen adversary rolled and bumped into him. Down he went, also, but on top!

A few half-smothered oaths, a few harmless jabs and punches, as they rolled over and over in a short struggle that was more like a friendly scuffle than a finish fight, and then the two boys got up. On guard again, glaring belligerently at each other, they stood a moment, waiting for a renewal of the attack. But the unexpected outcome of their first clash had taken most of the fight out of them. So, with little more ado, they rescued their water carts from the ditch and went together down the hill to the well.

As to who was the victor and the measure of his advantage, there was no end of friendly debate and chaffing. Both boys claimed the advantage, and found partisan support in their contention. But the issue was never again put to the decisive test, for the fair Helen, whose vagrant favors had inspired it, left Elliston soon thereafter, to find elsewhere—it may well be thought—a larger field for her bewitching smiles to subdue.

CHAPTER 4

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

I

THAT unfortunate distinction which Elliston made between Paul Wesley and other boys was the source of most of the unpleasant, even bitter, personal experiences of his boyhood and youth. But it went even deeper than that, much deeper than those who thoughtlessly voiced it could possibly have foreseen. It placed upon his conduct an artificial and unwholesome constraint.

Conformity was imposed upon him by the pressure of public opinion. Not only was he not permitted to do many things that other boys might do, but there were some things that he must do; not necessarily, so it appeared to him, because they were inherently desirable or of intrinsic virtue, but merely that he, the preacher's boy, was expected to do them.

Nor was Paul Wesley slow to appreciate the expediency of conformity. He was not long in discovering that for himself the path of least resistance lay in that direction. At the early age of seven years he made the first public acknowledgment of the obligations imposed upon him by his minister-father's position. It was at the close of a special service for the Sunday School, on the last Sunday of a protracted meeting. With a number of children he went forward and gave his hand to

the visiting minister as a token of his desire for admission into the church. He may have been, and doubtless was, influenced by the emotional appeal of the occasion, just as the other children were. Moreover, it may well be, that his act was more a response to parental desires and promptings than was the action of his companions. He knew that he was expected to do what he did on that Sunday afternoon. The stage had been especially set for that response. Not only would his failure to respond have been disappointing to his parents, but it would have appeared inexcusable in the eyes of his father's people. The prescribed line of conduct for the preacher's boy led straight to the chancel rail of his father's church.

The minister gravely shook Paul Wesley's hand, and then expeditiously, with an efficiency born of many successful evangelistic campaigns, directed him into position in the rapidly forming line of applicants. And thus, standing in that long undulating line of children, he was received into the church as its members slowly passed by, extending to each child in turn the hand of Christian fellowship.

First came his father, tall, gray-haired, commanding in appearance, visibly moved by his son's presence in that line. Placing an arm around the boy's shoulders, he murmured, "God bless you, my boy," and then moved on, offering a word of prayer or commendation as he grasped the timidly extended hand of child after child. Close behind him came the boy's mother, her eyes shin-

ing with love and thanksgiving as she softly sang "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." Gathering her boy into her arms, she kissed him and quickly passed on. And in turn came other mothers and fathers, welcoming their children into the saving and protecting fold of the church.

At last they were in their seats again. The last stanza of the closing hymn sung, the benediction pronounced, the service was at an end. Paul Wesley slipped quickly out of the building and joined the other children who were shyly, and rather awkwardly, trying to restore their natural relationships.

He was a member of the church. He supposed, so far as he gave it any thought at all, that he was converted—changed in some strange and mysterious manner. Vaguely he realized that he had assumed certain responsibilities in the eyes of his fellows. Doubtless, too, he was, more or less, resolved to walk henceforth in a newness of life, as he but dimly understood its terms and requirements. Perhaps, though, he only walked a little stiffly and self-consciously.

II

On a vacant block, back of the courthouse and on the unoccupied side of the square, a game of baseball was in progress. The Elliston *Coyotes* were playing the Carter Valley *Eagles*. So intense was interest in the contest—a renewal of the annual rivalry between the two teams—that business was practically suspended in

the little town, and the entire Elliston population, old and young, with few exceptions, was there, rooting for the home boys. Even the courthouse was closed for the game.

There, on the sidelines, in the very front rank of the excited, loyal supporters of the *Coyotes*, were Johnnie Wilson and Carl Foster and Harry Mason—all of his youthful friends and companions—but Paul Wesley was not with them. At the corner of the courthouse, one hundred yards away, he stood alone!

For days and days he had eagerly anticipated that game as he drank in every detail of Elliston's accounts of the prowess of the *Coyotes*. More, perhaps, than he had ever wanted any one thing, he wanted to see that baseball game, to be down there on the sidelines with Johnnie Wilson and to drink in every detail of that exciting contest.

His father was away from home that afternoon, visiting one of the outlying appointments on his circuit. To his mother he had appealed for permission to go to the game, but she had been constrained to deny his plea. Baseball—a matched game of baseball—was a worldly pleasure, proscribed by the Methodist *Discipline*.

"No, son, you know I can't let you go," she told him. "You know your father would not approve of it."

"But, mama, I want to go. Johnnie is going—all the boys are going. Please, mama! I don't see how it would hurt for me to go."

Neither could his sympathetic mother see that after-

noon how it would hurt for her boy to see that game of baseball; but she knew that his minister-father would not approve of his going, and she knew, too, that for Paul Wesley to attend the game would compromise the pastor in the eyes of his people.

"Please, mama! Please——"

"No, Paul Wesley," she interrupted his eager pleading. "You mustn't ask me any more. You know I can't let you go."

Paul Wesley understood. He knew why she must deny his plea; and he realized something of what it was costing her to say "No." But so intense was his desire to see the game that he could not desist from pleading.

At last he had obtained permission to go as far as the courthouse. Unable wholly to withstand the boy's eager, passionate plea, the mother made that concession—one of the many compromises she was often called upon to make between her conception of what was due her son and of her duty to her husband and the cause he represented.

"But you must promise that you will not go farther than the courthouse," she had stipulated.

"Yes'm; I won't. I'll stay right there at the corner," Paul Wesley promised as he bounded away, eager to catch even a glimpse now and then of the game.

The crowd was between him and the players. He could see little of the game, but he could hear the crack

of the bat as it met the pitched ball; could hear the encouraging shouts of the rooters as a favorite player dashed madly around the bases; could hear the muffled thud of the ball in the waiting glove; and he could see his eager, excited companions running here and there, edging themselves closer and closer to the sidelines. All of that he must see and hear from the courthouse, one hundred yards away from the thrilling spectacle, because he was the preacher's boy and they would not approve of his attending a matched game between two neighboring small-town teams.

He saw Doctor Grant leave the grandstand and start toward the courthouse, on his way to his office. "What's the score—who's ahead?" Paul Wesley inquired eagerly as the physician came up to him.

"Five to seven—in the fifth inning—our favor," the Doctor said. "But why aren't you down there with the other boys? You can't see anything from up here."

"No, sir. I know I can't; but they wouldn't let me go any farther."

Doctor Grant was astonished; also sympathetic. "What in the world——! What difference does it make whether you are here or down there on the sidelines with the other boys? Go on down there and see the game."

"I don't know," Paul Wesley replied, "but I promised I wouldn't go any farther."

Doctor Grant shook his head in puzzlement. It was

incomprehensible. But he had no more time for questioning—the message that had called him away from the game was urgent. He hurried on.

Nor could Paul Wesley understand that afternoon why they—his father and the Christian people, especially the Methodists, of Elliston—should object to his seeing that baseball game, but he knew that they were responsible for his having to stand alone at the corner of the courthouse while the other boys were down there on the sidelines.

One thing was then and there deeply impressed upon his young mind: baseball was on one side of the line and they were on the other. It was necessary, he decided, to choose between the two sides. Thus it was that, there in the lengthening shadow of the Elliston courthouse, baseball became for Paul Wesley Polk the synonym of all the desirable things that lay outside the boundary lines of his father's church.

And it was there, also, that the preacher's boy first raised the red flag of revolt. No longer would he submit unresistingly to being set apart from his fellows; nor would he willingly give up the things that it seemed necessary for him to renounce in the rôle assigned him. Religion—the sort of religion the Methodist church professed and his father exemplified—demanded too much giving up things he enjoyed and in which he could see no wrong.

CHAPTER 5

DOCTOR GRANT

I

NEXT to Colonel Keener, Doctor Grant was the outstanding figure in Elliston. He was a man of striking, even distinguished, appearance; tall and slender, with deep-set, piercing eyes and an air of singular independence.

In his professional capacity the physician was an intimate part of the community; but of Doctor Grant's private life and antecedents Elliston knew little. Behind the veil of reserve in which the man shrouded himself Elliston was not permitted to see. He was enveloped in a veil of intriguing mystery.

In a small, one-story house that served both as a residence and office, Doctor Grant lived alone, aloof from the intimate gossip life of the little town. That house, with its weather-beaten sign—*Doctor Horace L. Grant*—on the front door, was one of the oldest buildings on the square, where nothing was old and all was comparatively new. It was no less a familiar part of the town than the Elliston Mercantile Company's squat, one-story, red-brick structure, where its owner, Colonel Keener, in a scarred and much-whittled chair, propped against the wall of the front porch, directed the business affairs and moulded the opinions of half the county

around; nor was it less known than Bennett and Sons' two-story, frame building, headquarters of the Bennett Ranch and Farm Properties, where, on the upper floor, met in their turn Masonic, Woodmen and Odd Fellows lodges.

Everyone knew Doctor Grant's office, with its paper-littered desk, big red-leather chairs and bookcases behind whose glass doors stood, tier upon tier, hundreds of professional works, both old and new; but of the pleasant sitting room just beyond, with its easy chairs, pictures, books and magazines—all the penates of a studious, cultured man—Elliston knew little; no more than an occasional glimpse through a half-open door revealed.

Ten years before, when he was about thirty-five, Doctor Grant had come to Elliston, from whence Elliston knew not, nor cared little—in those hurly-burly days when a straggling cow-camp was being transferred into an equally straggling inland town by one of the periodic booms that swept successively over the west Texas of the nineties, converting over-night somnolent villages and even strategically located open spaces into ambitious town sites and future metropolises. What strange quirk of fate had turned his steps toward the raw, straggling community that had so little to offer to a man of his distinction and professional skill was a question for an older, soberer, more reflective Elliston to ponder.

With meager success, however, had Elliston looked for authentic information. But where knowledge was

silent, rumor and conjecture spoke with confidence. Thus Elliston, fusing scraps of fact, much of rumor, and still more of conjecture, into a fairly accurate whole, had formed an answer to its neighborly curiosity. Embittered by the defalcation of a trusted business associate and grief-stricken by the death of his beautiful young wife, the brilliant young physician had fled from his home in a distant state and after bitter years of aimless wandering had, largely by chance, arrived at Elliston. Here, attracted by the pulsing life of the new town, or lacking the will and purpose to carry him farther, he had stayed on and begun again the practice of his profession.

II

Doctor Grant and the new pastor of the Elliston circuit had soon become good friends. They were about the same age, and in their mutual scholarly tastes enjoyed a congenial companionship that nowhere else in Elliston could either have had. In Doctor Grant's pleasant, book-filled sitting room they found a haven from the exhausting demands of their professions.

And on one memorable occasion, Doctor Grant had appeared at Brother Polk's Sunday morning service. He had done that merely out of courtesy to the pastor, to pay his friend the compliment of hearing him preach. But so obvious and natural an explanation of his motives could not have been expected to occur to an Elliston congregation. Doctor Grant was no churchman; sel-

dom, if ever, before had he been in an Elliston church. And Elliston had long since put him down as an atheist or, even worse, an infidel. True, no one could have produced tangible proof of his atheism or infidelity; but where all, with the exception of a few case-hardened and abandoned souls, were Methodists, Baptists, Campbellites, or of other faiths, the mere fact that the doctor belonged to no church and took no part in religious services was proof enough.

But Elliston had more than that. There also had rumor and conjecture supplied additional material. The death of his lovely young wife and her unborn babe, so ran the Elliston account, taking on new and still more interesting details with each successive repetition, had so embittered the young physician that he had foresworn faith in a merciful Providence. More than that, Elliston in an awed voice averred, he cursed God, and never since that day had believed in God or the Bible.

No end of comment was occasioned by Doctor Grant's appearance on that notable Sunday morning. In some quarters it was put down to the credit of the new pastor, and the more optimistic of Brother Polk's people sanguinely hoped that it was but the beginning of Doctor Grant's ultimate reclamation and connection with the Elliston Methodist Church—to the eternal welfare of the doctor and the temporal benefit of the organization. But in other quarters it was not so favorably regarded. Colonel Keener, as might well be supposed, spoke for the dissenters. The colonel had his own reasons for

viewing with disfavor the growing friendship between his pastor and the physician. In the first place, there was jealousy and pique. Colonel Keener expected to be, as he had always been before, the benevolent patron of the Methodist pastor; and Brother Polk had thus far exhibited no desire for the colonel's patronage. And, too, he cordially disliked Doctor Grant, who from the first had gone his way, apparently oblivious of any reason why he should consult the likes and dislikes of the imperious Colonel Keener. Moreover, Doctor Grant had a keen insight into human nature, with the wit and skill to express most effectively the results of his scrutiny. For such as he, the colonel's big pompous figure offered a tempting target; and so during the ten years of their association not a few of the doctor's most caustic shafts had found lodgment in the colonel's most vulnerable parts.

But those were not the reasons the outraged over-lord of Elliston Methodism gave out as an explanation of his disapproval of the pastor's friendship for Doctor Grant. On other, and more plausible, ground the colonel took his stand. "Consortin' with publicans and sinners might be all right in some ways, but it ain't doin' the Cause any good for him to be spendin' all his time with an atheist—an infidel, for all I know—and maybe readin' a lot of his infidel books," the zealous defender of the Methodist Cause complained, with a dolorous shake of his head, conveniently forgetting that Doctor Grant's atheism was in a large measure his own

invention, put forward as a defense against the physician's frank, stinging criticisms of the colonel's pious shams and his arrogant dealing with those so unfortunate as to be placed within his ruthless power.

III

Had he been less occupied with bitter reflections, Paul Wesley might have found in that chance encounter with Doctor Grant, at the corner of the Elliston courthouse, some degree of compensation for his disappointment. The physician's striking figure, seen against his romantically mysterious background, had held the boy's interest ever since his arrival in Elliston.

At first it was the doctor's reputed atheism. To the son of a Methodist circuit rider of that day an atheist was indeed an awe-inspiring figure; one that Paul Wesley had never before beheld. And here in the person of Doctor Grant was one who had actually cursed God and foresworn all faith and belief in God and the Bible! Paul Wesley almost shuddered when he thought of the awful temerity of the man.

But that awe and half-fear had passed, dispelled by his father's friendship for Doctor Grant; and in their stead were confidence and sympathetic admiration. Watching the physician as he came and went on his daily round of duties, behind one or the other of the two beautifully matched and carefully groomed teams that alternated in Doctor Grant's exacting service, the boy had experienced a feeling of warm sympathy for

the loneliness of the silent, aloof man who had, by some inexorable fate, been exiled from the congenial world that was the proper frame for those sleek-coated dappled grays and shining bays. Through the reminiscent eyes of his mother, he had seen something—fleeting, shining glimpses—of the alluring beauty of that other world; that of Edith Bruce and Colonel Hamilton Bruce, whose gracious nobility of bearing was in such marked contrast to the churlish, sanctimonious arrogance of Colonel Keener.

No farther than that, however, had his interest ventured before that afternoon of the baseball game. In Doctor Grant's aloofness, where even the bluff, outspoken assurance of men of the field and open range instinctively paused, there was no encouragement to boyish advances. Nor did Paul Wesley have the adventurous forwardness that in another might have carried him buoyantly past all barriers to curiosity and desire.

But after that meeting at the corner of the courthouse it was different. Recollection of the gracious response to his question as to the progress of the game and the kindly, sympathetic understanding that the eyes and words of Doctor Grant revealed gave him assurance. So he had, not directly, but with the persistent indirectness of a boy, approached the goal of his desire, another chance to talk with Doctor Grant.

And then, one afternoon, a week or so later, success had rewarded his persistence.

The doctor had just driven up, hitched his team, and was stepping up onto the porch of his office when a boyish voice greeted him.

"Howdy, Doctor Grant."

"Very well, thank you. How are you, sir?" Doctor Grant replied, scarcely pausing on his way into the office.

But halfway to the office door, he stopped. Recollection had suddenly tugged at his attention.

"Oh, hello! It's you, isn't it?" he said, as Paul Wesley scrambled to his feet, immensely pleased, but too confused to frame a coherent reply.

"Haven't seen you since the game," the man continued. "And, by the way, how did it come out? I know the *Coyotes* won—and the score, but that's all. Come in and tell me about it."

And with that Doctor Grant opened the door and directed Paul Wesley to be seated. "Just a moment. I've got two or three prescriptions to write," he explained as he sat down at his desk and began writing.

Paul Wesley, in one of the big, red-leather office chairs, watching the physician as he rapidly filled blank after blank with strange hieroglyphics, felt very important. What a story he would have to tell Johnnie Wilson and the others! He, Paul Wesley, had been invited to come into Doctor Grant's office and tell him about the game! And then he began to feel rather nervous and self-conscious. Something of the old feeling of awe

had returned; and he wondered if he hadn't been rather presumptuous; too venturesome——

His reflections were cut short. "All right—now we can talk," Doctor Grant announced, as he tore off the last prescription and swung his chair around, facing Paul Wesley. "I had to leave in the fifth inning. It was pretty good so far—'Red' was going fine—had struck out two *Eagles* in that inning and had just slipped a fast one by Brooks——"

"And he fanned him, too," Paul Wesley, bolt upright on the edge of the big chair, broke in eagerly.

"—And they scored twice in the sixth—'Shorty' led off with a hot liner to short—went right through 'im—and 'Shorty' made it to second," the boy went on and on, all of his nervousness and timidity gone; forgotten in the thrilling recollection of that baseball game.

"Fine! By George, that was great," Doctor Grant commented enthusiastically as Paul Wesley climaxed his story with a vivid account of Shorty's running one-handed catch of a long drive into deep left field that had threatened to tie the score in a desperate ninth-inning rally by the *Eagles*.

He had enjoyed Paul Wesley's account of the game. He was fond of baseball and rarely ever missed an opportunity to see the *Coyotes* play. But at the present moment his chief interest was the boy himself. More than once since that chance meeting at the courthouse he had recalled his pathetic figure and had thought

that he would seek an opportunity to see him again and learn something of his story. But in the meantime there had been busy days. Away out on the Bar X ranch the infant grandson of Old Bill Wright, grizzled rancher and frontiersman, was giving the doctor and all concerned no end of anxiety, and forty miles away, on the opposite side of the county—to say nothing of his troubles in between, a gunshot wound here and a snake-bite there—the wife of a nester was critically ill, too poor and out of the way to receive proper care and attention. Now, however, with the Bar X assured of an heir, and with his other patients getting along well, he welcomed the chance to talk to the boy who had so unexpectedly challenged his attention.

“But, tell me, how did you get all that?” Doctor Grant asked when the boy finished his story. “You couldn’t have seen it from the courthouse. Did you take my advice and go down there on the sidelines?”

“No, sir,” Paul Wesley replied, dropping into the depths of the big chair, his eyes clouded with embarrassment. “I couldn’t do that—I’d promised mama I wouldn’t go any farther than the courthouse. But I saw some of it—and Johnnie and the rest of the boys told me all about it.”

Then, after a brief pause in the conversation——

“But what I don’t understand,” Doctor Grant continued, “is why you couldn’t go to the game—why you had to promise to stay at the courthouse.”

And then as Paul Wesley made no reply he went on: "You said that you had promised your mother that you would stay there. Does she object to baseball?"

"No, sir, mama doesn't object to baseball—she's different—she likes games; but——" He stopped short, undecided as to whether he should go on.

"Your father?" Doctor Grant questioned suggestively.

"Yes, sir. He—he objects to baseball—won't let me go to matched games," Paul Wesley replied in a low voice, and again paused. A feeling of loyalty to his father held him back. He was not sure that Doctor Grant would understand; and he did not wish to belittle his father in the physician's eyes.

"I understand," Doctor Grant said reassuringly, with keen appreciation of the boy's delicacy of feeling. "He's a minister, and that makes a difference—has to 'avoid even the appearance of evil,'" he added kindly, but with just a flick of impatience in the final words.

Paul Wesley nodded agreement; he, too, understood.

A moment of silence followed—silence charged with sympathetic understanding that had no need of words.

Then Doctor Grant spoke again, "By the way, do you like to read?" he asked.

The answer was immediate, with convincing assurance.

"Yes, sir; I sure do." He was sitting forward again, on the edge of the chair, his eyes glowing with anticipa-

tion. Was he going to see all of those beautiful books in Doctor Grant's library that his father had told him about?

"Good. That's fine," the man commented, smiling with appreciation of the boy's enthusiasm. "All right, come in here, and let's see what we can find," he continued as he rose from his seat and stepped toward that closed living room door.

IV

That was the beginning.

There was to be more; much more—a friendship and congenial companionship, the like of which the boy had not known since the end of the happy days of childhood. Books—Scott, and Dickens, and Mark Twain—the exquisite pleasure of long evenings spent with *Ivanhoe*, *Oliver Twist*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Tom Sawyer*, when even the tantalizing, forbidden lure of baseball was forgotten. And talk, man to man talk, of many interesting things—of college days, with all their glamour and glory of baseball and football and debating teams; when pennants, year-books and trophies of track and gridiron—all the treasured mementoes of the man's own glorious youth—were brought forth from the dusty recesses into which they had been thrust as of no account in a grown-up world, but never quite forgotten; and their faded glories revived, illumined anew, by the glowing admiration in the eyes of the boy.

CHAPTER 6

DIVINE PRESENCE

I

PAUL WESLEY thought a great deal about God ; not that he loved God or wanted to serve Him, but for the simple reason that He seemed to be so inextricably involved in all of the affairs of Paul Wesley's little world that he had to take God into account in all that he did or planned to do.

To Paul Wesley, then, God was no less real than Professor Hardcastle or his own father ; nor did he so much as question His personal superintendency of human affairs. From a great white throne on high God looked down upon His children on earth, noted their every deed and read their secret thoughts. On His left, pen in hand, sat the Recording Angel, writing down in irrevocable script all that the omnipotent eye of God beheld.

The attitude of Paul Wesley was not worshipful ; except during revivals, he was not greatly concerned about his attitude toward God. It was God's attitude toward him that gave Paul Wesley concern. God had an inconvenient habit of interfering with one's own plans and ambitions. He had, and often exercised, the right to call one into His service, and if you were called you had no option in the matter but must do His bidding. You might want to be a lawyer when you grew

up, but if He intended you to preach or be a missionary, it was no use to kick against the pricks; you might as well save yourself the pain and trouble first as last.

And for that reason Paul Wesley felt just a little resentful. He didn't want God interfering with his plans for the future, if indeed that was His intention; and he was rather afraid it was. But he knew that he couldn't afford to express his resentment. One had to respect God, because, if for no other reason, He could summarily punish anyone who was contemptuous of His will and authority. The Bible was full of examples of God's vengeance being visited upon people who did not respect and obey Him.

No, you couldn't shake your fist in His face and tell Him you didn't mean to do whatever He wanted done. If you did such a presumptuous thing as that, you might be struck by lightning or swallowed up by an earthquake.

II

That was one side of it; the personal aspect of God's relation to Paul Wesley. The other side, seen quite as often and no less vividly, was the personality of the Deity his father worshiped, the Divine Presence invoked when, at the close of the Scripture lesson, his father reverently closed the Book and with the words, "Thus endeth the Lesson; let us pray," knelt before his people.

Then, even before they were uttered, Paul Wesley could hear the opening words of the invocation:

"O, Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! Thou Almighty God, who hast set Thy glory above the heavens and who hast been our dwelling place in all generations, to Thee we come now, invoking Thy Divine Presence."

Wherever he heard them, in the Elliston, new, red-brick, Methodist Church, with its white plastered walls and carpeted aisles, or in an unpretentious little church in an out-of-the-way corner of the circuit, or even in a little country schoolhouse, littered with scraps of paper and pencil shavings, in the presence of a mere handful of worshippers, the impression created in the mind of Paul Wesley was always the same: the walls of the building seemed to recede, farther and farther away, until at last they encompassed the holy hill of God itself, the infinite spaciousness of Zion. And as the voice of his father, growing in the fervor of adoration, sonorous as the over-tones of a great pipe organ, continued: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" the boy, whose eyes had never beheld any land save the unending prairies of his native west Texas, could see, beyond the limitations of time and space, that celestial mountain height on which was the abiding-place of the Most High, "who before the mountains were brought forth, even from everlasting to everlasting, art God."

And there, in that rarefied atmosphere, in the sanctified company of Isaac and Jacob and of the saints of the Lord in all the generations of the earth, was where

Paul Wesley felt his father properly belonged. He was not, it seemed, so much of this world as he was of that other one, which in his rapt, inspired gaze seemed so real, so very near.

But of those things Paul Wesley rarely, if ever, spoke. Outwardly, on the surface of his life, there was little indication of the inner tumult of boyish thoughts and feelings. To the casual observer he appeared not different from Elliston's own sons; a tall, slender lad—somewhat over-tall for his age—with the sensitive delicateness of his mother's features and something of his father's lithe strength of body, passionately devoted to baseball and equally indifferent to Latin and other things on which Professor Hardcastle and his father set such store. Beneath his natural boyish reticence Elliston saw nothing of the troubled, uncertain stream of his inner life, which, just then issuing from the quiet, protected channel of childhood, was sweeping toward the full tide of youth, exposed to the deflecting cross currents of heredity and desire that thrust it first this way and then that, chafing against the walls of constraint on either side and fretting itself into a youthful fury.

Locked within the recesses of his own thought was all that tumult, because there was no one to whom he could go with the questions and problems that troubled him. There was one to whom he might have gone for help—she was sympathetic; she understood; and for her there were occasional fleeting glimpses into the

mystic, thoughtful grayishness in the depths of her boy's eyes, beneath the glowing blue-gray of her own—but a little, four-room parsonage, overflowing with younger brothers and sisters, offered scant opportunity for confidential talk. From other boys he could not expect sympathetic understanding. To them he was "the parson" or "the preacher." Thus for him to have revealed to them any unusual interest in things of a religious cast would have been little short of inviting ridicule. There was Doctor Grant, in whose companionship he had found sympathy and understanding; but not even to him could Paul Wesley reveal all that was in his mind and heart, so inextricably was it involved with his sense of loyalty to his father. Nor could he go to his father. There, least of all, it seemed, could he look for help—such was the irony, even the tragedy, of their situation. On the one side was the son, who in the very hour of his birth was dedicated to the service of his father's God; on the other, the father, whose fondest dreams in the intervening years had been of the fruition of his cherished hope that the boy should follow in his own footsteps. Their mutual approach was most difficult, fraught with embarrassment and misunderstanding.

The slightest interest that he might manifest in any subject of religious significance was only too apt, as Paul Wesley had long since learned, to be taken by his father as evidence of the Divine influence upon the mind and heart of the boy. And likewise the expression of

any transient boyish hope or ambition inconsistent with the father's wishes was, more likely than not, to be provocative of misunderstanding and opposition.

But had that obstacle not been in the way, and had his father's figure been invested with less of the aloof, reflected resplendency of the tabernacle of the Most High, it would even then have been difficult for Paul Wesley to bring himself to a discussion of God and His attributes with his father. Brother Polk was extremely sensitive to anything that smacked of irreverence. God must not even be thought of, much less spoken of, except in terms of profound respect and reverence. That Paul Wesley knew; and he knew also that for him to ask any question that might be construed by his father as irreverent was to invite stern reproof. Experience had taught him the value of discretion, the expediency of silence.

III

One day at school he had been taken in by a catch question about God's power. One of the older boys sprang it on him at recess. "Say, Paul Wesley, you ought to know a lot about the Bible—your dad's a preacher and you go to Sunday School and everything—but I'll bet I can ask you a question you can't answer."

He should have been warned; but, having been put on the defensive by the other's adroit approach, he fell into the trap.

"I'll bet you can't either. I know as much about the Bible as you do," he retorted.

"All right, we'll see if you do. I answered it right off the bat, the first time I heard it, but I'll bet you can't, even if you do know so much about the Bible and everything."

Then after another moment of sparring, the question was sprung:

"You don't think there is anything that God can't do, do you?"

"No, 'course I don't. Anybody ought to know that; God can do anything He wants to."

Paul Wesley was quite confident that he had silenced his opponent. Why, anyone who knew anything at all about the Bible ought to know that God was all-powerful—omnipotent, his father called it.

"Is that so?" the older boy came back sarcastically. "Well, then, tell me whether He could make rocks bigger'n He could lift?"

"Course He couldn't. There isn't anything——" He broke off in the middle of his explanation. He saw, too late, that either way he answered he would contradict his first confident assertion of God's omnipotence.

"Ha, Ha! You thought you knew a lot about the Bible, didn't you, Parson?" his victorious opponent giped, as a general laugh went up at Paul Wesley's expense.

That afternoon, on the way home from school with a group of boys and girls, among whom were his sister Lucy and his little brother, Paul Wesley decided to

even up the score by making someone else the victim of that catch question. Following the same line of approach that had proved his own undoing, he trapped one of the youngsters into an acceptance of his challenge. "'Course He couldn't; you couldn't make anything bigger'n God could lift," the child confidently asserted.

"Well, then, isn't that something He can't do?" Paul Wesley retorted, starting a boisterous laugh in which two or three of the children half-heartedly joined.

"Paul Wesley, you ought to be 'shamed of yourself," his sister flashed out reprovingly.

"Why? What's wrong about that?" Paul Wesley countered.

"Why, because it isn't right—that's what. Is isn't reverent; and papa would sure get you if he heard you ask it."

"Shucks! That's nothin'. I believe I'll see if he can answer it when I get home," Paul Wesley replied with braggadocio.

"All right, Mr. Smarty; I dare you to try it," Lucy retorted, placing him in a position from which he could not recede.

They found Brother Polk sitting on the front porch, reading the *Texas Christian Advocate*. He looked up, greeted them, and then resumed his reading, expecting the children to go into the house. That was what Paul Wesley would have liked to do; but he knew that Lucy and the little brother were watching to see whether

he would make good his boast. So, after a moment's hesitation, he took the plunge.

"Papa, I want to ask you a question—one I heard at school today."

"All right, son; what is it?" the father replied, laying aside his paper.

"Well, sir, the Bible says God can do anything, doesn't it?"

"Yes. It teaches us that God is omnipotent—all-powerful."

"And that means that there isn't anything that God couldn't do if He wanted to, doesn't it?" Paul Wesley went on, feeling his way. He realized that he was on dangerous ground, but saw no way of retreat.

"Why, yes; you might put it that way. There is no limit to Divine power."

"Well, then, if there isn't anything that God can't do—? Why—?"

"All right, what's the question?" Brother Polk suggested.

"Well, could He—er—could He—make rocks bigger than He could lift?"

"What! What's that?" his father demanded in amazement—shocked.

He sprang up out of his chair, stood a moment speechless, looking at the now thoroughly frightened boy. Then, recovering his voice, he said sternly, "Young man, I'm surprised at you. I never expected to hear a son of mine say such a sacrilegious thing. Yes, that's

what it is—sacrilegious, blasphemous. You ought to be ashamed of yourself; if you're not; and I—I ought to give you a sound thrashing—to teach you a lesson——”

Paul Wesley was ashamed of himself; and he realized that he stood a good chance of being severely punished.

“What did you mean anyway by asking such a question?” his father continued.

“Nothin’—I just asked it for fun. I didn’t mean anything bad—,” Paul Wesley replied, somewhat relieved. The danger of a whipping was growing less every moment it was delayed. By being very careful he might avoid the consequences of his foolhardiness.

“Well, it wasn’t funny; and you should know better than to make light of holy things. Let this be a lesson to you. God’s name should never be taken lightly. Flippant references to God are the height of irreverence and deserve the severest condemnation—— And there is your little brother—what sort of example are you setting for him?”

Paul Wesley made no reply. He felt that the wiser course was to let his father do all the talking.

Then Brother Polk sat down, adding as he did so, “Run on now and do up your night work; but don’t ever let me hear you say such a thing again. You won’t get off so lightly the next time.”

There would be no next time for him, Paul Wesley thought as he hurried away. Asking his father a silly catch question about God wasn’t a thing to repeat.

CHAPTER 7

SABBATH OBSERVANCE

IT was Sunday morning at the big Paradise camp meeting on Rock Creek. A small group of boys, already dressed in their Sunday clothes, was assembled on the bank of the creek a short distance from the camp site. Behind them arose the pleasant, subdued sound of the great camp being put in order for the day's services, with now and then the clatter and commotion of wagons and buggies arriving on the scene and discharging their cargoes of men, women and children, with great hampers of food and tableware for the noon-day dinner on the ground.

But of all that they were only indifferently aware. Their thoughts were then of the long Sabbath day that lay out ahead of them and of Rock Creek sparkling invitingly in the bright morning sunshine. On week days they were free to follow their natural inclination to explore the creek and to swim and fish in its deep, clear pools; but on Sunday all such pleasant diversions were strictly forbidden, and they must remain in camp and decorously attend all the services. First this morning would be the Sunday School, followed immediately by the eleven o'clock preaching service. In the afternoon there would be a special song and prayer service;

and then another long preaching service in the evening would complete the day of Sabbath observance.

The prospect of a long day of decorous inaction was not pleasing and the lure of Rock Creek was strong.

"Gee! I wish I could dive right off that old limb yonder," feelingly declared one of the group, as he threw a rock—a nice flat sailer—over the cliff and far down the stream, where it struck the water, skipping and glancing along the surface and starting a succession of rippling waves.

"Gosh, don't you though?" one of his companions enthusiastically replied.

At once a common desire possessed them. The wish to throw off the depressing restraints of the day and to dive off into the creek was uppermost in the minds of all.

"Let's slip down below the bend and go in washin'," one of the bolder spirits suggested.

"We wouldn't have 'nuff time; it's most Sunday School time now," he was reminded.

"Aw, who wants to go to Sunday School, anyway?"

"Well, I don't; but Pa'll git me if I don't."

Another supporter of the daring proposal to slip off and go in swimming spoke up. "Maybe, they wouldn't miss us in all that crowd; and if we hurried we could stay in a little while and then get back in time for church."

While that tempting suggestion was being carefully weighed, Paul Wesley spoke out, adding fresh fuel to the flame. "We won't have another chance after to-day—the meetin'll likely close tonight, I heard papa say last night."

That settled it. The temptation to take a last swim in Rock Creek was now too strong to resist. Carefully choosing their route so as to avoid discovery, they made their way to a favorite "washin' hole" a half mile below the camp, where they quickly and unceremoniously divested themselves of Sunday clothing and dived pell-mell into the water.

It was a glorious morning; just made to order for such an experience. Never before had they so fully appreciated the privilege of going in swimming. Doubtless, the fact that they were indulging in a forbidden pleasure added zest to their sport; but, at any rate, they were having a glorious time. Sunday School, the preaching service, and parental wrath were forgotten or disregarded in the exquisite pleasure of the moment.

But it was not to last. Already a scandalized church was reaching out its long arm to inflict upon them the pains and penalties of its displeasure. Brother Polk was one of the first to discover their absence from Sunday School and to learn its cause. Others volunteered to go and bring the truants back to camp, but he insisted upon performing that task himself.

Poised upon a ledge of rocks overhanging the pool, ready to dive off into the water below him, Paul Wesley caught a glimpse of an approaching horseman.

Instantly he recognized him.

"Gosh, darn! Papa! Yonder——"

Surprise and consternation checked the startled exclamation. Motionless, with the sunlight glistening on his wet skin, the boy watched the approach of that awesome figure.

Indeed, the spectacle that he saw was one to hold spellbound the attention of any beholder. There, coming down the creek, was his father, Brother Polk, in Sunday morning attire, astride a small cow-pony, sitting bolt upright in the high cantled western saddle whose stirrups were far too short for his long legs, his whole appearance eloquently expressive of the righteous indignation that had impelled him to leave the camp and its religious duties to go in search of his delinquent son.

Paul Wesley's surprise and fear were instantly communicated to his companions. Hushed were the joyous shouts. A death-like stillness settled down upon the pool, as the boys in the creek settled down in the water to their chins, apprehensively waiting.

When his father rode up, Paul Wesley was hurriedly getting into his clothes.

"What does this mean, son?" Brother Polk sternly demanded.

"Nothin', sir; I—I thought I would get back in time——"

"But you knew better than to come off down here this morning; you knew better than to go in swimming on Sunday."

"Yes, sir; but I thought——"

He was not permitted to finish the explanation.

"Get up here behind me," his father commanded, as the boy got into his last garment.

"And, the rest of you boys, my advice to you is to get back to camp—to the services—as quickly as possible."

With that parting word of advice to the boys in the water, Brother Polk turned the horse around and rode off toward the camp.

Silently and thoughtfully father and son rode a short distance to where there was a luxuriant clump of willows, the location of which had no doubt been carefully noted by Brother Polk when he passed it a few moments before. There he brought the horse to a stop and commanded Paul Wesley to get down; then he himself dismounted, and with thoughtful precision selected and cut from the tree a long willow switch. Further details of the scene then and there enacted need not be described.

A few moments later they were back on the camp ground. Brother Polk started at once for the arbor, where a large congregation was already assembled

awaiting the pastor's return to begin the service. "Come on, we are already late for the service," he told Paul Wesley, who had indicated a desire to delay his appearance.

"Let me run by the tent just a minute. I—I ought to brush my hair before I go in," the boy insisted as he indicated his still damp hair as an excuse to escape the embarrassing publicity of entering the arbor with his father.

"No, come now," his father relentlessly commanded. "You should have thought of that before you ran off. Your hair is all right; much better than your conduct this morning."

They approached the arbor from the rear. At the entrance Brother Polk paused and with a gesture of his left hand brought Paul Wesley up beside himself; then slowly, deliberately, he started down the center aisle toward the platform. Instantly all was quiet; hushed was the pleasant hum and stir of conversation that had preceded their entrance. All eyes were turned upon them. But there were no smiles, no giggling, or other evidences of amusement. That procession of the tall, stern-faced minister-father with his delinquent son beside him prompted no thought of levity. It was more suggestive of retributive justice, of the wrath of the outraged Lord of the Sabbath, than of comedy.

Halfway down the aisle Paul Wesley hesitated an instant and with questioning eyes glanced upward; but in his father's face was no affirmation. No, not even

there, in the partial haven of the middle rows, was he to find a seat; but still farther forward—perhaps to the very front rows—he must go.

Then abreast the last rows of benches, immediately beneath the platform, Paul Wesley stopped to turn aside, looking for a seat; but a touch on his arm and the one word “come” told him that not even there in the white glare of the front rows was he to stay. With one foot upon the platform steps Brother Polk waited for the boy to precede him; and then, stepping up onto the platform, he directed the boy to a seat, turned to the desk, and in a solemn voice announced the opening hymn.

There, on the front row of the platform seats, between the choir leader and a visiting minister, kneeling when they knelt and standing when they stood, Paul Wesley was gleefully discovered by his erstwhile companions in the morning’s interrupted adventure as they, singly and by two’s and three’s, slipped quietly and as inconspicuously as possible into places in the rear and on the outer edges of the congregation.

CHAPTER 8

A SHOW COMES TO TOWN

A SHOW was in town!

Paul Wesley got that thrillingly interesting bit of information from Carl Foster as he dashed by the parsonage on his way to town to verify the story he had just gotten from his sister, Alma, of the arrival of Professor Marchbank's "Famous Magic Lantern Show."

"Hey! Where you goin'?"

"Town—to see the show," Carl answered excitedly.

"Show! What show?"

"Why, a big Magic Lantern Show; that's what! Alma said she saw it come in just now. Come on, let's go see it."

An insignificant, itinerant wagon-show drove into Elliston and stopped on the square, and a few moments later every small boy in the little town was all aquiver with excitement. Thirty miles, a full day's journey from the nearest railway point, Elliston was off the path of the big railway shows and circuses; and it was seldom that a show of any importance made its appearance there. Few Elliston children had ever seen a real circus. Thus the occasional arrival of an itinerant wagon-show was an event of tremendous importance to them.

Paul Wesley and Carl arrived on the square breathless but in time to hear the conclusion of Professor Marchbank's eloquent announcement of the marvels to be revealed in the forthcoming exhibition of "the latest scientific development—the magic lantern." Already two or three boys who had chanced to be on hand when the show drove into town were dashing around the square, darting into and out of stores and offices, distributing flamboyantly printed handbills descriptive of the "interesting, instructive, and scientific" address which the professor proposed to deliver with the aid of his marvelous device.

The use of the school grounds for the evening's performance was granted by the school directors, who, impressed by the professor's claims as to the scientific and educational nature of the entertainment, felt it to be their duty to sponsor it. It may be that a liberal distribution of complimentary tickets heightened their interest in the demonstration of the educational device; but, be that as it may, when Professor Marchbank drove from the square on his way to the school grounds, he was followed by practically all of the youthful male population of Elliston, eager to watch the preparations for the staging of the show.

Paul Wesley had never seen a magic lantern show. In fact, he had seen few shows of any sort; for his father, mindful of the *Discipline's* classification of shows, baseball games, and many other forms of recreation as worldly amusements, would not permit him to

attend such exhibitions. Seldom, indeed, in Paul Wesley's experience had the parental ban on such things been lifted.

He hoped, however, that this would prove an exception. The character of the entertainment was the basis of his hope to secure permission to attend. This was not to be an ordinary theatrical performance, but a great educational and scientific event. Surely, he thought, there could be no reasonable objection to his seeing that sort of show. Why, it was almost the same as a lecture—a lyceum lecture. And it was to be held on the school grounds. That fact itself was a guarantee of its educational value.

Thus the boy marshalled his arguments as he hurried off home to ask his mother for permission to attend Professor Marchbank's show. His father was not at home, a circumstance which, he felt, favored him. With her more liberal view of wordly amusements his mother would give his request a sympathetic hearing.

But it was not to be as easy as he anticipated. Sympathetic as she always was with the boy's desire to do the things permitted other children, the wife of the Elliston pastor was constrained to withhold the desired permission.

"You know, son, that your father doesn't approve of our going to shows," she protested in answer to the boy's excited plea.

"Yes'm, I know he doesn't, but this isn't a show—a sure 'nuff show—it's a—an education. It says so here."

Paul Wesley insisted, exhibiting one of the famous scientist's handbills. "And it's to be at the school, on the school grounds," he went on eagerly as he noted signs of his mother's being influenced by the professor's claims. "Why, over at Crowell he gave it in the schoolhouse, and the school got a part of the money for new seats or somethin'."

The woman to whom these arguments were addressed hesitated. The pastor's wife questioned the advisability of letting the boy have his way. She recalled a former occasion in Roxton when she and her children, in the absence of the husband and father, witnessed a rendition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* under the auspices of the local church organization.

Everybody in the little town was going to the play. Her children were eager to go, and as the entertainment was for the purpose of raising funds to apply on the church debt, she felt that she would be expected to do her part in the advancement of the cause. But she was afraid that her husband, who had been called away from home for a month's evangelistic work, would be displeased if she took part in the affair. She was not aware at the time that his people had taken advantage of the pastor's absence to put on the show; so she was at last persuaded to attend the performance.

Nor had her fears been ill-founded. When he returned and discovered what means had been employed to obtain funds to pay for the house of the Lord, Brother Polk was indeed displeased. He made that

fact very clear to his people on the next Sunday morning. His arraignment of them was something that Roxton long remembered. Nor did he overlook the fact that his wife and children had been present at the performance. "It is with deep regret," he stated, concluding his indictment of the affair, "that I must acknowledge that my wife and children were also present."

It was a humiliating experience, one that she could never forget. So, while the mother plead the boy's cause, the pastor's wife hesitated.

"Anyway, we can't afford it, son; if you go, Lucy and your little brother will have to go; and I don't think I can spare the money."

Now Paul Wesley appreciated the force of that objection. Too well he knew how scarce was ready money in his parsonage home, how necessary it was for his mother to conserve the limited amount of cash received by the pastor to provide the necessities of life for his family. And, however strongly he might contend for his right to attend the show, he could not insist on being given the money for that purpose. No, there was nothing for him to do but give it up.

He left the house immediately after the interview with his mother, going to the pasture to drive home the two milch cows that had been lent to the preacher's family by Colonel Keener. He was sorely disappointed; all the way to the pasture and back, and while he did the evening chores, his mind dwelt on the injustice of the situation. Why couldn't they have money

to spend for shows like other people? Why did a preacher always have to be poor? He wondered if all preachers were poor like his father. No; perhaps a presiding elder, or a bishop, or a big city preacher wasn't poor and hardup; but his father wasn't one of that favored class. He was poor, and his children couldn't go to shows and have lots of things that other folks' children had. "Why, I wouldn't be a preacher and never have any money—not for anything," he declared vehemently to himself, as he concluded his summary of the disadvantages of the ministry.

No, sirree; they needn't expect *him* to be a preacher—even if they never had any more preachers for their old church!

Now, lawyers were different; they had money. He felt sure that lawyers made a lot of money and that their children could go to shows and do a lot of interesting things that were forbidden preacher's children. He meant to be a lawyer when he got to be a man!

And it was such a small amount of money that he needed—only a quarter of a dollar. But that was, after all, a lot of money to Paul Wesley, more than he was accustomed to have at one time for spending money. He tried to think how he might get the money for a ticket to the show, but every plan that he thought of appeared on second thought impracticable. He thought of trying to borrow it from Carl Foster or one of the other boys, but he had to dismiss that as impracticable also. He knew that none of the boys was likely to have

more money than was necessary for the purchase of his own ticket. Moreover, he knew that if it were possible for him to obtain by that means money for a ticket for himself, he couldn't get a sufficient amount for his sister and little brother. He knew also, even without asking, that his mother would be unwilling for him to borrow the money. In fact, he himself would be unwilling to follow such an embarrassing course.

No, he must give it up. He must stay at home while the other children of Elliston were having a good time, beholding wonders revealed by the magic lantern.

The milking was finished; there remained but one more task for him to perform. He must feed his mother's little chickens. From the crib he got some corn. Immediately he was surrounded by a clucking, eager flock of chickens, scrambling for the feed and crowding out the little ones for which it was intended. He tried repeatedly to shoo the old chickens away, but without success; they would not be driven from that feed. An old rooster was the most persistent of the greedy flock.

At last the boy lost all patience. He was not in an amiable frame of mind to begin with, and he really wanted an opportunity to vent his feeling of disappointment and wrath. That old rooster was simply inviting serious trouble.

"Shoo! SHOO! Dog-gone you; I'll bet I make you move!" the boy cried as he savagely kicked at the rooster, narrowly missing him.

"Wish I'd hit you—and killed you, too," he went on, as the rooster flew squawking out of reach. "And the rest of you, too," he added, launching an attack on the flock of hens. "No use to feed you—not worth feedin'—won't lay——"

He stopped short. Perhaps he could go to that show, after all. He suddenly recalled that his mother had said just a few days ago that she would like to sell some of those chickens; they were not laying, and it was not worth while to keep them. But in Elliston, where every family had its own flock of chickens, there was no market for them. Perhaps he could trade some of these worthless chickens to Professor Marchbank for tickets! He remembered having seen on one of the show wagons a coop with a half dozen chickens. Doubtless, chickens purchased along the way constituted a part of the professor's food supply. At least, it was worth trying.

A moment later he was earnestly explaining the plan to his mother. "You said you'd like to sell 'em," he reminded her. "Well, then, let me trade some of 'em to the show man for tickets, so we can all go to the show."

Lucy and the little brother joined in the appeal. "Please do, mama; let him do it," Lucy pleaded. "I want to see the show. Alma's goin'—everybody's goin' but us." And the little brother, jumping up and down and swinging onto her in his eagerness, begged, "Please, mama; p-l-e-a-s-e let us go."

Their combined appeal was too strong for her to resist.

"All right, you may go and try it," she consented. "You may have as many as six, with the old rooster," she told Paul Wesley.

With a glad shout, Paul Wesley turned away and dashed for the front gate.

"Wait brother," the younger boy shouted, starting off in pursuit of Paul Wesley. "I want to go with you," he cried.

"No! Go back; you can't go—you can't keep up with me," Paul Wesley flung back over his shoulder as he sped on.

Arriving at the school grounds, he found Professor Marchbank willing to talk trade. A bargain was soon struck and the highly elated boy was off on flying feet for home.

"He'll do it! Said he'd trade!" he shouted to the younger children as he dashed through the gate on his way to the lot. "Come on, and help me catch 'em."

To catch them was a matter of only a few moments. Then, with their heads dragging in the dust, squawking protestingly, six hapless chickens—an old rooster and five fat, lazy hens—were being carried by the two boys toward Professor Marchbank's blazing camp fire.

CHAPTER 9

DEFICIT

I

AN air of expectancy and anxiety pervaded the parsonage. This was Quarterly Conference Day, the fourth and last formal meeting of the church officials for the year, and upon the outcome of the conference the pastor and his family had much at stake. There was the pastor's salary—far in arrears. The conference collections, or the greater part of them, were unpaid. These obligations of the circuit must be raised today, if at all. Moreover, the results of the meeting of the official board would determine whether they should remain at Elliston next year or move on to another charge; for in a few days the pastor must go to the Annual Conference, to account for the year's work, and, as they well knew, the Annual Conference authorities would not look with favor upon a pastor who failed to make a good showing in the collection of the conference assessments. At that important meeting the "all collections paid in full" yardstick would be used to rate local pastors, and accordingly as they measured up to that standard would be their chances for promotion or continuance in their present positions.

In the front room the father was busily engaged,

completing his quarterly report, accounting for the last load of wood or bushel of potatoes that had been contributed as quarterage for the support of the pastor and his family, and checking up the last small payments on the collections, in short, summarizing the visible results of his pastorate: collections, conversions, additions to the church, and administration of the various ordinances.

The mother was no less busy. The importance of the official occasion demanded unusual care in the preparation of the children for the services; then, too, dinner must be prepared before she left for the church. That also required special attention, for she could count on having three or four, and possibly not less than an even half dozen, official delegates from the outlying works at the parsonage for dinner.

Late the day before, the presiding elder had arrived. And now, in the home of Colonel Keener, he was comfortably awaiting the hour of his official appearance.

In the Methodist world of Paul Wesley's childhood a presiding elder was an important personage. Four times a year, on Quarterly Conference occasions, he made the round of the district, visiting the charges and checking up on their pastors. To the most prosperous and influential member of the local church belonged the honor of entertaining the elder on his official visits. In Elliston there was no one who could successfully challenge Colonel Keener's claim to that privilege. The presiding elder represented the Annual Conference

organization. He was a member of the bishop's cabinet, and was, in the affairs of his district, only a degree below the bishop in power and authority. His recommendations largely determined the annual appointments of the preachers. A presiding elder's favor spelled preferment and choice works; his official frown was something to be feared by the inmates of country parsonages.

Brother Polk was not a favorite of presiding elders. But this was not altogether the fault of those officials. His own attitude toward the district supervisors had much to do with it. Brother Polk prided himself on his independence. He believed in saying what he thought and acting according to the dictates of his own conscience. He would not, or rather could not, court official favor. The Methodist itinerancy was, he believed a divinely ordained institution whose appointments should be accepted as coming from the Lord. Thus he had a profound contempt for his co-laborers who courted official favor and sought by wire pulling to influence their appointments. He contemptuously referred to such preachers as boot lickers. If his ability and work entitled him to promotion, all right; but he wouldn't, he declared, stultify himself by asking for it. So in his zeal to avoid the very appearance of fawning, he went to the opposite extreme, and assumed an attitude of reserve and aloofness that belied his real character and disposition.

The son shared his father's attitude toward presiding

elders, or rather what he understood Brother Polk's feelings to be. As a class—there were notable exceptions—he did not like them. He resented their failure to recognize his father's ability by assigning him to better works. He was inclined to hold them responsible for whatever hardships fell to the lot of himself and his family. Presiding elders were paid big salaries; they lived in large, comfortable parsonages in the big towns and could afford to give their children lots of things that his father could never afford. Paul Wesley didn't mind, of course, their having all that good fortune, but he resented their not making it possible for his father and his family to share it, especially when all they had to do was to tell the bishop to send Brother Polk to a good station the next year.

II

For three-quarters of an hour Brother Brown, the presiding elder, discoursed eloquently and impressively on "The Church—the Church Visible—God's Kingdom on Earth"; then, bringing his sermon to an abrupt close, he stepped down in front of the pulpit and called to order the Fourth Quarterly Conference of the Elliston circuit.

The elder was brisk and business-like. In rapid-fire order he disposed of the routine affairs of the conference and was ready for the real business of the session.

"Brethren, we now come to the important matter

before this conference," he announced. "At the First Quarterly Conference Elliston circuit was assessed eight hundred dollars for the support of the pastor this year. In addition to this, the District Board assessed the circuit three hundred dollars for the general collections; for missions, education, superannuates, bishops' support, et cetera."

The congregation listened to the presiding elder's crisp summary of its obligations, painfully aware of what was coming later. It was an unpleasant business, but they might as well face it now and be done with it.

Brother Brown went straight to the point. "To date, you have paid—let's see——" Here he consulted his memoranda. "Yes, here it is—four hundred and twenty dollars—on the pastor's salary; just a trifle more than half the amount you obligated yourselves to pay for the support of your preacher and his family. And only fifty per cent of the general collections have been raised."

The presiding elder paused a moment to give his audience time to appreciate the gravity of the situation. Then he continued. "This is the last Quarterly Conference for the year; and these assessments must be raised today, if at all. Elliston circuit has always met its obligations to the church, and it must not fail this time. In a few days your pastor will go up to the Annual Conference; you cannot afford to let him go there without a good report. Besides, he has served this charge faith-

fully the past year and he should be paid what you promised him. The church should discharge its solemn obligation to support its pastor and his family. 'The laborer is worthy of his hire.' "

At the front, on either side of the presiding elder and facing each other, sat Colonel Keener and Brother Polk. Remarkably alike in many respects they were; big, forceful, impressive in appearance, and independent in thought and action. As the congregation listened to the official indictment of their failure to meet their obligations to the church, they were keenly conscious of the presence and relationship of those two men. Officially the presiding elder was in charge of the meeting, but it was dominated by those two silent figures. The circuit had known for some time that its most influential member was not in harmony with his pastor. For many years prior to the coming of Brother Polk, the colonel had been the dominant figure of the Elliston circuit. He was the largest contributor to the support of the charge, and had, therefore, assumed the right to exercise a controlling influence on its policies. Elliston pastors remained on the circuit, or moved on to other fields of usefulness, accordingly as they retained or lost the colonel's support. From the outset of their official relationship as pastor and lay-leader, Brother Polk's independent and aggressive administration of the affairs of the charge had clashed with the colonel's long accepted assumption of leadership. And today the rivalry between them, a rivalry unacknowledged by

either of them, but none the less real and personal, must reach its climax.

Colonel Keener, as his wrinkled brow and nervous attitude indicated, was deeply distressed. He knew that upon his action would largely depend the results of the conference, and he was undecided as to his course. He did not want the church to make a bad showing in the pastor's report to the annual conference, for that would give the charge a poor rating and make it difficult to secure a good man the next year. But, on the other hand, if the charge should pay out, Brother Polk would get the credit for it and there would be no excuse for a change of pastors. And the colonel wanted a change. He had already said as much to the presiding elder. Besides, Colonel Keener knew that a large part of the burden of paying out was on his own shoulders. He would have to head the list of subscriptions to make up the deficit. At any moment now he might expect the presiding elder to put the matter squarely up to him by calling for pledges from each of the charges on the circuit.

And that was just what the presiding elder did.

Turning directly to the colonel, he asked, "Brother Keener, how much of this deficit can you and the other stewards raise before Conference?" And after a short pause, he added, "We must have something definite; and I'm going to ask each charge to state just what we can expect of it." Aside to the secretary he said, "Brother Smith, you make a note of the pledges."

Then, "All right, Brother Keener, now let's hear from you. What amount will you pledge Elliston to raise?"

Colonel Keener rose slowly to his feet, looked around the room as if sizing up the situation, and then responded to the presiding elder's question. "Well, Brother Brown, this has been a mighty hard year for us; the country is in bad shape financially; and the folks are really not in position to pay more." Here the colonel paused and again looked around at the congregation as if he sought corroboration of his statements. "Then, too," he continued, "the church seems rather dead-like. We've fallen into a state of apathy; I suppose that's what you'd call it. Any rate, it's goin' to be mighty hard for us to pull out this year. I don't know just what Elliston can do. It'll depend a great deal on what the other charges will do. I've already paid about all I'm able to, but I'm willin' to go a little stronger, if the rest of the folks will."

The colonel sat down.

The situation certainly did not look promising, but the presiding elder went right ahead. "Brethren, we must have something more definite than this," he declared. "We must raise these assessments today. Your pastor has put in his full time on this charge. His family is dependent upon his salary as pastor of this church for their support. You can't afford to default on this solemn obligation. The time is growing short. Let's have something definite. Brother Jones, your

place—Thompson's Mill—was assessed two hundred dollars; you have raised just about half of that amount. Let's hear from you—how much you can pledge Thompson's Mill to raise."

Brother Jones got up, addressed the presiding elder, and haltingly made his report. He, too, testified to the seeming hopelessness of the situation. It had been, as Colonel Keener said, a bad year for all of them; the people were hard pressed financially on account of the drought and the low price of cattle, and it was mighty hard to raise money for the church—harder than most years, it seemed. "But," he concluded his report, "I'm like Colonel Keener; I've already paid about all I'm able to, but I'll go a little stronger, if the others will. I think you can put us down for fifty dollars, Brother Smith; maybe we can do a little better'n that, but that's all I can promise."

He too sat down, much relieved.

"All right, Brother Jones, that's fine. Now let's hear from the other charges," the presiding elder declared. "Brother Thompson, what about your place? Let's see—Paradise was assessed one hundred and fifty dollars. You've done a little better than some of the other places, but you are considerably behind. What can we count on from Paradise?"

Brother Thompson reported for Paradise; and then, in order, the representatives of the remaining charges spoke for their people. The reports differed little from those of Colonel Keener and Brother Jones. Each of

the stewards told of the hard times that prevailed on the circuit, the difficulty they had experienced in raising money for the church, and the general apathy of the membership. No one directly charged the pastor with responsibility for the embarrassing situation; but the implication was clear. If it was true that the people had exhibited an unusual lack of interest and it had been unusually difficult to get them to meet their obligations to the church this year, whose fault could it be but the pastor's? Certainly no one could think of blaming them.

Seemingly unmoved and undisturbed by the thinly veiled charges preferred against him, and with a quizzical smile playing over his face as each speaker in his turn offered the same excuse for the failure of his charge to do its duty to the church, Brother Polk sat there, listening calmly to all that was said. He had heard it all before, and he accepted it as a part of the day's work. But his son, back there in the congregation, did not have that philosophical viewpoint. It made Paul Wesley's blood fairly boil to hear those men blame his father for their own indifference and lack of interest in the cause they professed to love. He wanted to get up and shout, "That isn't true. You know it isn't true, you're just letting old Colonel Keener lead you around by the nose. He don't like papa, 'cause he can't boss him like he does everybody else—that is what's the matter with him."

But of course he could not say any of those things,

no matter how badly he wanted to, or however true they were. And that was another thing he didn't like about the whole darned business: one couldn't speak out and tell all of them where to get off. Oh, wouldn't he like to tell them just one time what he thought of them! Oh, yes, they'd go a "little stronger," and "maybe they'd pay out"—and the presiding elder was just sitting there taking it all in, and makin' out like he thought they were doing all they could. Why didn't he have some backbone, and tell them he knew better'n that? Of course, he knew they weren't tellin' the truth about why they hadn't paid his father what they owed him!

He wished his father would get up right there and tell them what was what—tell them he wasn't beggin' them to pay their old quarterage. Beggin' them to pay! Yes, that was what they thought about it—a preacher had to beg 'em to pay him. Charity! He hated it—Colonel Keener—all of them—the whole blamed business—and he wish'd his father wasn't a preacher!

Then he thought of his mother. He looked across to where she sat, bravely trying to hold up her head and face a frowning world. He knew how humiliating it was to her. But she was like his father; she couldn't let on that she minded it, because she was the preacher's wife. Well, he was the preacher's son, but that didn't keep him from hating it. He did hate it—and he wanted to tell them so. He would, too, some time!

"All right, Brother Secretary, now give us the re-

sults. What is the total of the pledges?" the presiding elder asked when all the reports were in and had been tabulated.

The secretary responded by announcing that the circuit would pay out in full at the close of the year, if all the pledges were redeemed. At any rate, the shortage would not be very great.

The business of the conference was over. The presiding elder stood up, motioned to the congregation to rise, and started the *Doxology*, at the conclusion of which he pronounced the benediction. With a sigh of relief the congregation broke up. Many of the brethren and sisters went forward and shook hands with the presiding elder, inviting him to go home with them for dinner. They had enjoyed his sermon, they told him; it was just what they needed—a good, strong, doctrinal sermon—the kind they ought to have preached to them every once in a while.

But Sister Polk did not linger in the church to greet the presiding elder and mingle with the dispersing congregation. Taking her younger children with her and calling to Paul Wesley as she passed him in the yard to hurry on home and help her, she hastened to the parsonage, to finish dinner for Brother Jones and Brother Thompson.

CHAPTER 10

MOVED AGAIN

I

IN the city of Fort Worth a session of the Northwest Texas Conference was nearing its close. The spacious auditorium of First Church was crowded with clerical and lay delegates and local visitors for the Sunday evening meeting. In a few moments the bishop would begin reading the appointments for the ensuing year, assigning the preachers to the two hundred or more charges scattered throughout the broad expanse of the Conference.

Always the most interesting feature of the annual session because of its personal significance to each of the preachers, the reading of the appointments was of unusual interest now. The presiding bishop, so it had been reported, was taking things pretty much into his own hands in the matter of making appointments, upsetting the carefully made plans of the presiding elders, forestalling some of the pre-arranged swapping; and, in short, throwing an exceedingly troublesome and unyielding monkey wrench into the hitherto smoothly running cogs of the Conference political machine.

The air was full of rumors; startling changes were prophesied. The "bottom rail" was to be elevated; the "top rail," dropped. Those who professed to know all

about it declared that a general shake-up all along the line might be expected. Most of that was, of course, merely conference gossip, nevertheless it was extremely interesting and diverting. Other conferences had heard similar rumors of impending shake-ups that failed to materialize in the appointments; but the present was different. There was, it must be admitted, a solid foundation of truth in the gossip this time. The situation did present some interesting possibilities, especially for those at, or near, the top of the conference ladder, who naturally were eager to retain their favored positions.

The bottom rail contingent could not seriously credit the promise of their elevation to the dizzy heights of the topmost rail, but it was extremely diverting for them to witness the anxious and worried "high steeple fellers" rushing about, snatching up such crumbs of comfort as the presiding elders let fall. There was little comfort the presiding elders could give them, for they themselves were very much in the dark. They had to confess that the old bishop had listened gravely to the recommendations of his cabinet and had then withdrawn into the seclusion of his own room to make up the list of appointments. He was making a serious mistake of course; but what could they do? He was the bishop, and a bishop's word was law.

But, within the hour, all of the gossip and speculation would be at an end; and then it would be as it had always been before. Those to whom the bishop's eagerly

awaited announcement should bring preferment or continuance in the favored ranks would glow with elation and satisfaction, while the others—those to whom it would mean the disappointment of hope deferred or the realization that they faced another year of hardship and sacrifice—would bravely accept it all as the Master's will, resolutely stifling any feeling of resentment or envy of their more favored brethren. Together, the fortunate and the unfortunate, all would bow in varying degrees of reverence, while the venerable ecclesiastical head invoked a Throne of Grace in their behalf—that there might be vouchsafed to them grace and strength for the work lying out ahead. Then, obedient to the divine command to go forth into the world and preach the gospel of salvation by grace, they would go out from that place to their respective charges; comfortable, well paid stations, circuits, and starvation missions.

Out yonder, on the far-reaching frontiers of the Conference, interest in the proceedings of that pregnant hour was no less intense. There, in scores of little parsonage homes, were the wives and children of the bishop's valiant soldiers of the Cross, anxiously awaiting the news of the appointments.

That news, when it should arrive, what would it mean to them? Would it mean that they must move again into a strange and unknown place? Or would it mean that they were to be permitted to remain in their present homes, among neighbors and friends?

And, if it were decreed that they should move, to which of the hundreds of works that made up the Conference would they be sent? On some of those charges were comfortable homes for the preacher's family, good schools, and pleasant, cultured people. On others there were—well, to say the least of it, the prospect of being assigned to some of those works was not inviting.

In Elliston, two hundred miles away from that Conference scene, the possibilities of the hour claimed the attention and dominated the thoughts of the occupants of the parsonage.

"The bishop is probably reading the appointments now," the mother told her children. "The Conference usually closes Sunday night."

"Where do you reckon he will send us, mama?" Lucy asked.

"I don't know. There is no telling; he may send us a long way from here——"

"Well, I hope he sends us somewhere where they've got a bigger parsonage," declared Lucy, "where I can have a room of my own. I'm tired of being cooped up in a little, old house like this."

"I hope he sends us out West—'way out West—where there's lots of cattle and cowboys and some Indians," Paul Wesley declared, interrupting his sister's complaint against Elliston's failure to make proper provision for a young lady member of the pastor's family. "Don't you want to go out West, mama?"

"No, son, I don't think I want to go any farther

West. The wind blows too hard out there, and there are too many sand storms. I'd rather go the other way where we used to live before your papa was sent out here."

They would move. That was taken for granted. They expected to move at least once every two years; and sometimes, as on the present occasion, they moved at the end of one year's work. It was Brother Polk's policy to ask for a change whenever a respectable minority of his people appeared to desire it; and usually there was, by the close of his second year anyway, a very respectable minority who were not averse to a change of pastors. His aggressive and independent administration of the affairs of his charge could always be depended upon to bring about a considerable amount of friction.

It was so on the present occasion. The Elliston charge expected a change. An active minority of the members, under the leadership of Colonel Keener, had made that fact clear to the presiding elder at the last Quarterly Conference. The good of the cause, in their judgment, demanded a change of pastors.

Oh, no; they had no ill will against Brother Polk—a good man, doubtless—and meant well, of course; but he could do just as well somewhere else, and a new man could perhaps bring all of the factions together and give their church a fresh start.

Tactfully, very tactfully, it was suggested that the presiding elder might send them a man whose family

would—well, fit in better. Of course, they didn't want to criticise her; but it *was* true that some of the people felt that Sister Polk hadn't taken as much interest in the church as a pastor's wife should.

Oh, yes, it was true that she had several young children; that was another thing the presiding elder ought to know about. Brother Polk's children—especially the oldest one—that boy!

Of course, the father was away from home a great deal of the time, and doubtless Sister Polk found it difficult to control him; but, after all, he was pretty bad—given to swearing and fighting. The professor had been forced to whip him several times. That had caused the preacher to be criticised and to lose his influence with the church.

Thus taking all the facts into consideration as the elder should, it was clear that the charge should have a new pastor. Anyway, unless there were a change, it would be difficult for the charge to take care of its financial obligations next year. Oh, yes, it was true that they had not quite paid out this year—they hadn't paid Brother Polk all they had been assessed for the pastor's support, but after all the charge wasn't a very strong one financially.

And that was another reason for a change. Elliston wasn't able to support a preacher with a large family, one that was—er—well, rather extravagant. They ought to have a man with a small family—a young

man—who could live on what the charge was able to pay.

II

And the pastor, knowing all of that, had gone up to the Annual Conference to give an account of his stewardship and to ask for a change of pastorates, leaving his family at home to prepare to move—they knew not where.

Finally, on the second day following the close of the conference, they received the eagerly awaited word. The message, telegraphed to the nearest railway point and brought from there to Elliston by mail, contained but four words: "Moved—sent to Morton."

One word of the message, the name of the new charge, would have been sufficient. In that one word they could have read a complete new chapter in their life's story; another severance of the ties of home and friendship, packing up, loading, moving and settling in a new home, in a strange place, in short, beginning again in a new environment all of the activities of home, school, and church.

CHAPTER 11

CYCLONE

I

ON the third day following their departure from Elliston, they arrived in Morton. A strenuous afternoon lay ahead of them. The next day would be Sunday, when the new pastor was expected to make his initial appearance. There was too little time for them to unload and straighten up all their household effects, but they had to unload and move into the parsonage such beds, trunks and cooking utensils as would enable them to get along over the Sabbath and make a proper appearance at the services.

It was a trying task. Their predecessors in the parsonage, eager to get away in time to reach their new appointment in a distant section of the state, had neglected to clean up the house and yard, leaving that disagreeable task to the newcomers. There were many evidences of the fact—one which was to be later confided to Sister Polk by the members of the Missionary Society—that the wife and helpmeet of the former pastor of the Morton circuit was not all that she might have been as a housekeeper.

During the course of that busy afternoon, after they had succeeded in bringing about some degree of order, a committee from the Ladies' Home Mission Society

called to offer their services to the pastor's family in the work of getting settled in their new home.

There they were, worn out from their long overland trip, grimy with the accumulated dust of the Morton parsonage, and up to their eyes in the disorder and confusion incident to setting up housekeeping in a new place, but they must cheerfully and cordially receive the visitors and submit themselves and their belongings to the critical inspection of the representatives of the local church and community. It was growing late and there were many things yet to be done; but they must sit down and patiently listen to the committee's familiar speeches of welcome and apologetic explanation of their failure to have things put in order before the arrival of the new pastor. They really hadn't expected him so soon, and the chairman of the committee had been sick; she really wasn't able to come at all; but she felt that she just must do it, when she heard that they had arrived.

And who was there to say that the committee had not absolved itself? Wasn't it perfectly clear that they had intended to do everything that could reasonably be demanded of them, but that the preacher himself had forestalled them by arriving on the scene earlier than was expected? Certainly. There was no dissenting opinion—expressed; but the objects of the committee's solicitude wondered why it was that the chairman of the reception committee was always sick, or out of town, or did not expect the preacher in so soon!

Apparently, however, the committee was not quite

satisfied that it had justified its appointment. "But now you must let us help you finish straightening up," the chairman declared.

"Oh, yes, indeed; you really must," insisted another member, when she saw that the pastor's wife was trying to frame a suitable reply, declining their belated offer of assistance. "Surely there is something we can do, and we would be so glad to do it."

"That's very nice of you," Sister Polk replied. "We appreciate your offer very much, but really there isn't anything you can do. We have just about everything done that we have to do this afternoon."

That was what she said. What she did not say, but felt like saying, was: "Now, if you really want to help me, why don't you go home and let me do some of the many things that you ought to know I've got to do this afternoon—things that you know very well nobody else can do? Don't you know that no woman—not even a preacher's wife—wants to have a lot of strangers around, when all of the intimate details of her family life are absolutely exposed, as mine are right now?"

But at last the ordeal came to an end. The committee, in response to its own direct question, had the assurance that Brother and Sister Polk expected to like Morton very much. Benignly, without undue haste, in possession of all the facts—including all the microscopic details—and with the parting word, "We hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing all of you at church tomorrow," they departed.

II

The long, trying afternoon was drawing to a close. They were prepared to camp, as it were, over Sunday. Out in the backyard, Paul Wesley was finishing up his task of chopping the Sunday supply of stove wood. Brother Polk believed that there was scriptural authority for pulling the ox out of the ditch on Sunday, if the ox fell into the ditch through no fault of the owner; but he also believed that it was the duty of the owner of the animal to exercise due diligence and keep him from falling into a ditch. Under some circumstances it would be scripturally permissible for him or his son to chop stove wood on Sunday, but he wasn't willing to let such circumstances arise if they could be prevented. Therefore, Paul Wesley was busily engaged on the parsonage wood pile—or rather, on what remained of a wood pile. His predecessor had reduced it to an almost irreducible minimum of tough, seasoned, axe-defying, left-over logs. Inside the house his mother was preparing supper for her tired and hungry family. The father had gone off to town a few moments before to make some last-minute purchases of necessary provisions.

Suddenly, with the unexpectedness of the proverbial bolt out of a clear sky, a sharp clap of thunder crashed through the stillness of the evening.

"Gosh, darn!" the boy exclaimed; with his axe arrested midway of an upward stroke, he swung himself around in the direction from which that unexpected

sound had come. He was amazed; he did not know what to make of it. And no wonder. The day had been clear, cloudless, with no hint up to that moment of a sudden change in the weather.

One glance disclosed the source of that startling thunderclap. In the northwest an ugly, threatening cloud was sweeping up over the horizon. Like a great mass of black smoke belched from a giant engine, it boiled upward, while from its swirling center long darting flares of forked lightning blazed zig-zag paths toward the ground, casting a lurid glare over the fast-darkening sky.

Before his mind could grasp those menacing details, there came another peal, nearer, louder, and more ominous than the first. Then, with ever-increasing frequency and intensity, peal after peal burst from the rapidly approaching cloud. The air quivered. Small whirlwinds, which caught up and bore aloft in their swirling currents loose scraps of paper, sand, dry blades of grass and weeds, sprang up, raced this way and that, and then were smothered in the oppressive calm that hung overhead. Already, above the rattle and crash of the thunderclaps, could be heard the roar of the on-rushing wind, sweeping across the prairies in a furious gale.

Paul Wesley had experienced some severe wind-storms, but this, he realized, at once, was no ordinary storm. It was either one of those terrible sand storms of which he had heard so much, or it was a cyclone, the

dread scourge of the Mid-west. And if it were the latter, a tornado, they were in deadly peril of their lives, for they seemingly were right in the pathway of the storm.

He was now thoroughly frightened. Dropping his axe, he ran to the house, dashed into the kitchen and shouted: "Mama, mama! A storm's coming—a cyclone! Come here quick and look!"

So sudden had been the approach of the storm and so engrossed had she been in her work that his mother was wholly unaware of the peril that threatened them. A storm! A tornado coming! It was incredible.

But in that instant, before she could adjust herself to the thought, confirmation of the boy's words was at hand. A crashing, rending peal of thunder burst directly overhead and the first gust of the rushing wind struck the house, slamming doors, rattling windows in their casings, and filling the room with sand and dust.

"Run, find little brother—he's out in the yard somewhere," his mother shouted to Paul Wesley. "Hurry! Find him and bring him into the house while I find the others."

Paul Wesley dashed out into the yard in search of the missing little brother, leaving the mother to collect the other children, to close doors and windows and do what she could to insure the safety of her home and children.

"Oh, I wish your papa would come," she cried to the frightened children now clinging to her skirts for protection. "I don't know what to do. And where is Paul

Wesley? I told him to find little brother and bring him in. Stay right here while I go and find them."

But at that moment Paul Wesley, with the younger boy, ran into the room. "Mama, come quick—to the dugout—right over yonder!" he cried. "I saw some people goin' in it just now. Maybe we can get there in time."

The storm cellar was in a neighboring yard, almost a block away. The shortest and quickest route was the back way, through the back yard and garden and across a mesquite-covered vacant lot, with two barbed-wire fences to be crawled under or climbed over. Paul Wesley, carrying the baby in his arms, led the way; his mother, Lucy and the little brother followed closely behind him. The wind struck them in violent, swirling gusts, buffeting them about and making it difficult to keep the course. In that fast-gathering darkness, intensified by the blinding, stinging sand that filled the air, they could not avoid running into thick clumps of mesquite bushes, whose sharp thorns caught in their clothing. But they struggled on, hoping to reach the dugout before the storm should break upon them in its full intensity.

At last they reached the dugout. The door was closed tight. Frantically Paul Wesley pulled and tugged to pry it open, shouting at the top of his voice, "Open the door! Please open it and let us in!"

The crash and roar of the storm drowned his appeals. His desperate efforts to lift the door were attributed

by the inmates of the cellar to the suction of the wind, and only resulted in the door being made more secure. It began to look then as if they had left the comparative safety of their home only to be caught out in the open and exposed to the full force of the tornado; but at last, in a momentary lull, he succeeded in making himself heard. The door was lifted, and they were permitted to stumble into the already crowded dugout; there to huddle in the darkness, in the midst of strangers, until the storm spent its fury.

In the meantime the father had, at the first warning of the approaching storm, hurried home. He found the house empty. After a short search, he was convinced that his wife and children had taken refuge with one of the neighbors. Then he turned his attention to the protection of the house.

In the kitchen he found a blazing hot fire in the stove, just as his wife had left it a few moments before. That fire was potentially a great deal more dangerous than the storm itself. Let the stove be overturned by the wind and the ruin would be complete. A fire would devour whatever the storm might leave. With but one thought, to prevent the terrible disaster which his mind had visioned, he caught up a bucket of water and drenched the fire. Instantly a cloud of hissing steam welled up, explosively filling the room. A sharp, rending, metallic crash followed; and, as the smoke and steam cleared away, a gaping rent appeared in the back of the fire box, exposing the interior of the oven.

A few moments later the storm was over. The cyclone had not struck the little town, but had swept across the open prairie, less than a mile away, leaving behind it a trail, one hundred yards wide, of blasted, twisted mesquite trees and bushes as witness to its destructive violence. The mother and her children returned to the parsonage, where the father anxiously awaited them.

The children were eager to recount their thrilling experiences. The father and mother, thankful that a merciful Providence had interposed and turned aside the terrible danger that had menaced their home and lives, had much to say to each other. But all of that must wait. There was much yet to be done. They all were tired and hungry after the long trying afternoon and evening. That unfinished supper must be completed without delay.

And then she discovered that appalling rent in her new cooking stove! It was too much. She wanted to cry—and did.

Her brand-new stove, installed only that afternoon, replacing the old and worn-out one left at Elliston after years and years of moving from charge to charge, was practically ruined before she had even cooked one meal with it—its fire box cracked wide open!

For a long, long time she had needed that new stove, but they hadn't been able to buy it. And now it might be ever so long before she could get another; all that time ashes would be falling down into the oven through

that crack in the fire box, and the oven wouldn't heat. It was nothing short of tragedy!

III

The change from Elliston to Morton had carried them still farther west, one hundred miles farther into the undeveloped ranching country. Morton, the county seat of Morton County, was, however, a town of considerably more importance than Elliston. It was the only town of consequence in the county and was the trading point for a territory of much wider scope than Morton County. On the east it was forty miles to the nearest railway point; to the south the nearest town with railway connections was no less distant, while toward the north and west lay an almost unbroken cattle range covering a distance of sixty to seventy-five miles.

On the whole they were well pleased with the new charge. It was a circuit, embracing the entire county; but outside of Morton there were only four appointments, two morning and two afternoon appointments. On account of its larger membership and financial strength, Morton claimed two Sundays out of each month of the pastor's time. This meant that Brother Polk did not have to be away from home so much as he had been at Elliston, where three Sundays out of the month his appointments were in the country. And, contrasted with his former salary of eight hundred dollars, the compensation of the Morton pastor was officially one thousand dollars. In favorable years,

when the ranges were good and the price of cattle high, that amount was paid; in other years the pastor's salary fluctuated with the extent of the droughts and the varying price of stock. Moreover, the Morton parsonage was more commodious and comfortable than the last one in which they had lived and which little Lucy had found so unsatisfactory.

Paul Wesley was especially well pleased with the change. True, he found no Indians at Morton, as he had hoped; the redskins had long since been removed from that immediate section of the state. But he found plenty of cattle, cowmen and cowboys. Immediately his thoughts turned toward a cow-pony and a real cowboy saddle. And he would have liked to turn out at once in high-heeled boots and spurs and a wide-brimmed Stetson hat, such as most of the men and boys of Morton wore, especially on Saturdays and in vacation time.

Years before their arrival, Morton had experienced its boom days, but even now many traces of the boom were to be seen. For miles and miles along the public road that led eastward toward the next county seat were grass-covered dumps and embankments that marked the right of way of a proposed railway that the promoters of the town-site had projected, and which they had abandoned when a two-year's drought put an untimely end to their ambitious schemes to make Morton a rival of the city of Ft. Worth, two hundred miles to the south-east. The proportions of the town-site itself testified

to the same magnificent, but unfulfilled, promise of metropolitan grandeur. A site of more than a square mile had been marked off into blocks and lots, with avenues, streets and alleys, few of which had ever materialized beyond the blueprints on which they were traced and the white-painted stakes that dotted the mesquite-covered prairie long after the subsidence of the boom.

In small groups, located here and there with little reference to the ambitious plats of the town-site promoters and at intervals of from one to three or four hundred yards, were the homes of the six or seven hundred inhabitants of the Morton of Paul Wesley's acquaintance. In the open spaces between the several groups of dwellings, cattle from the open ranges to the north and west grazed, coming there sometimes in large numbers on account of the water supply in the creek that marked the western boundary of the town.

On the extreme eastern outskirts, three-quarters of a mile from the square, was the school building, a large white—where any of the original paint was left—square, two-story structure, surmounted by a tall cupola and flag pole. This was another landmark of the boom days. Erected by the town-site promoters and described in their highly embellished advertisements as the "Morton College," it was still "the college" to the people of Morton.

CHAPTER 12

A LESSON

I

AFTERWARDS, when Paul Wesley looked back over his public school days, the figure of Frank Lawson, the principal of Morton High School, always stood out prominently in his memory; not that he especially liked or admired him, but the Morton principal was a figure not easily forgotten. Professor Lawson was a different sort of a professor from any Paul Wesley had ever before met. Six feet and two inches in height, he tipped the scales at two hundred pounds, without an ounce of superfluous flesh. Saturdays and during the summer vacations, he spent most of his time on a small ranch, leading the life of a typical cowman. It was no unusual occurrence for him to appear in his schoolroom Monday morning in high-heeled boots and with his trouser legs tucked inside in accepted cowboy style.

Professor Lawson was a strict disciplinarian. His pupils regarded him as strict or awfully strict, according to the state of their feelings at the time. He demanded the strictest compliance with the detailed rules of his school. According to his pedagogical theory, pupils were sent to school to study and he insisted on their doing so.

Paul Wesley's appearance in Morton scholastic

circles was not an auspicious one. After being briefly questioned as to his scholastic record and standing, he was given a number of algebra problems to work as a test of his proficiency in mathematics, a subject in which he was a rather indifferent pupil. As he tried to concentrate his attention on the problems, he was acutely conscious of being closely watched by the other pupils in the room. He was, in fact, much more interested in those pupils than in the problems between the covers of any book. He knew, however, that it was highly important right then for him to work these algebra problems, for already he had taken the correct measure of his new instructor. But he made little progress, and the end of his examination period was approaching.

Up to that point he had given very little attention to his desk mate, Ernest Porter, a shy, red-headed youngster about his own age. He had felt considerably disappointed when Professor Lawson assigned him to a seat with Ernest, having already observed a number of boys whom he would have preferred as desk mates. He saw at a glance that Ernest was not likely to be the captain of the baseball team or a leader in any of the school activities in which he was particularly interested.

A slight nudge on the arm—Professor Lawson's pupils were not permitted to whisper, and did so only at their peril—directed his attention to the tablet in front of his desk mate. There, worked out correctly by Ernest, the acknowledged leader of the algebra class, was one of those troublesome problems.

Now, it should be put down here in Paul Wesley's defense that he was not a cheater on examinations; not more so, at least, than the average run of pupils. But he couldn't solve those problems unaided, and he realized the extreme importance to himself of being able in a few moments to exhibit to that exacting professor—whose special hobby was algebra—the solution of a number of those problems. So he merely laid hold of the proverbial straw, copying the problems as Ernest Porter worked them.

At the appointed time Professor Lawson strode down the aisle, stopped at Paul Wesley's desk, and called for a report.

"All right, young man, let's see what you've done."

Paul Wesley handed up his tablet for inspection.

"Did you get them all?" Professor Lawson inquired as he quickly turned through the pages.

"No, sir; I just got four of them," Paul Wesley replied. "I didn't have time to finish."

"I see. Then let me hear you explain this one," the instructor said, placing the tablet on the desk in front of Paul Wesley.

It was a problem in double equations. Paul Wesley began to read mechanically the solution.

"But what about this sign?" Professor Lawson interrupted, indicating the algebraic symbol with a long pointed ruler.

"Why, it's a minus."

"But *why* is it a minus?"

Now Paul Wesley had not the least idea why it was a minus sign. He only knew that at that point in his solution of the problem Ernest Porter had a minus sign; but obviously, he didn't want to quote him as an authority.

"Well, why did you change it? Wasn't it a plus over there?" Professor Lawson demanded, indicating the quantity in the preceding line of the equation.

Paul Wesley thought he saw a way out of his difficulty. Perhaps Ernest Porter made a mistake when he changed the sign and it should be a plus.

"Yes, sir; that's right—it was plus," he cheerfully agreed, and then proceeded to make that troublesome minus a plus as before. He hoped that would satisfy Professor Lawson's curiosity as to minus and plus signs.

"So it ought to be plus, you think?"

"Yes, sir," Paul Wesley affirmed.

"I see. Well, what about this one? Did you forget to change it, too?" Again the ruler was pointing at one of those transposed quantities.

It was becoming very embarrassing to the boy. He felt that that intently listening room-full of pupils knew just why he was having such difficulty in accounting for his minuses and pluses. And, too, his faith in Ernest Porter's knowledge of algebraic signs was weakening. In fact, he wasn't at all sure but what he had been tricked into making the mistakes.

"Now, young man"—and the professor's tone was beligerent—"can you tell me why you changed those signs?"

"No, sir; I——"

"Then, why did you change them?"

Paul Wesley made no reply. He could not explain those changes. Nor did he relish the thought of confessing to Professor Lawson that he had copied the other boy's work. He was beginning to suspect, however, that the teacher knew more about those changed signs than he was then admitting.

"Well, speak up! You changed them—why?"

The professor's tone of voice and the way he gripped that long ruler admonished him that he had better make a clean breast of it.

"Because—— Well, sir; that was the way he had it."

"The way who had it?"

"Him," Paul Wesley replied in a low voice, indicating the boy at his side by a nod of the head.

"Then, am I to understand, young man, that you didn't do this work—that you copied it?"

Paul Wesley's silence was affirmative.

"Well, I didn't want Ernest's work; I wanted your work." The professor's tone and figure were expressive of righteous indignation. "And you tried to deceive me—to cheat. I knew all the time that you didn't do that work. I want to know what sort of boy you are anyway—is that the way you have been raised?"

"No, sir; I——"

"Well, it looks like it. And your father is a minister, isn't he?"

He had known all along that that question would come out sooner or later. Always, under all circumstances, when his conduct was questioned, his father's profession must be dragged into the discussion. Always he must be judged by a different standard from the one applied to the conduct of other boys.

He permitted the question to go unanswered. He knew before they were uttered what Professor Lawson's next words would be.

"Then, it looks to me as though you should have known better than to do as you did. You ought to know better, if you don't."

Oh, yes; he had heard all of that before, at Elliston, at Bentonville, and elsewhere. The speakers were different but their words were always the same. He made no effort to interrupt or to offer an excuse. He merely waited for the verdict to be pronounced.

"Come up here," Professor Lawson sharply commanded, as he turned and strode to the front of the room.

There was little doubt in Paul Wesley's mind as to what was going to happen to him then and there. Standing in front of the professor's desk, awaiting his further pleasure, he expected to hear the familiar command, "Pull off that coat, young man."

What, then, was his surprise when Professor Lawson spoke again, "Now, my young friend, I want you to apologize to this room for your disgraceful conduct."

The boy was dumbfounded. Apologize to that room! Why, he didn't know how to begin an apology to a room full of pupils whom he had never seen but two hours before, for something that did not, as he saw it, concern them in the least. He would have much preferred the genteel thrashing that he had expected.

"Well, didn't you hear what I said?"

"Yes, sir; but——"

"No buts about it, young man; you'll do what I tell you, or——"

There was no other way out—he stammered an apology.

"I—I know it wasn't right—but I didn't mean to cheat—and I hope you'll forgive me this time."

He turned and looked inquiringly at Professor Lawson, hoping, but not sure, that what he had said would satisfy him.

The principal nodded.

"All right, you may take your seat now. And I hope this will be a good lesson to you."

II

On their way home from school one afternoon, Paul Wesley and Alfred Barton came upon a gang of men digging holes at intervals of approximately eighty yards

along the public road that led eastward to the next county-site. Watching the workmen finish one hole and then begin another, they wondered what it meant. Then looking back toward town they saw another group setting long poles in the holes which the first had dug.

"Telegraph poles—that's what they are," Paul Wesley declared. "They're putting up a telegraph line."

"Telegraph line—nothin'," Alfred retorted scornfully. "That's all you know about it."

"Well, what is it then?"

"Why, it's a—anyway, I know it ain't no telegraph line. Who ever saw a telegraph line off of a railroad?"

Alfred had the better of the argument. Paul Wesley had to admit that, so far as he knew, telegraph lines were confined to railways.

"But they could have a telegraph line somewhere else if they wanted to, couldn't they?" he insisted. "Sure they could. Come on and let's ask them if they're putting up a telegraph line."

So they followed the workmen to the next hole and, after watching the operations a moment or two, Paul Wesley asked, "Say, mister, what are you digging these holes for—putting up a telegraph line?"

"No; not a telegraph line—a telephone line."

"Uh, huh; didn't I tell you it wasn't no telegraph line?" Alfred jeered.

Interrupting their debate, the workman asked, "You know what a telephone line is, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I do," Alfred, who had successfully maintained his superior knowledge of telegraph lines, replied. "It's a—well, I know but I can't explain——"

"Uh, huh—he knows but he can't explain," Paul Wesley mockingly jibed.

The man again interrupted. "I am surprised that you boys don't know what a telephone is. Don't they teach you at school about telephones?"

Then, on their admission that the Morton course of study was silent on the subject of telephones, the man continued. "All right, then, I'll tell you what it is, and then maybe you can tell the teacher something tomorrow that he don't know."

It was exceedingly interesting to them. They stayed there as long as they dared, watching the work and asking numberless questions about the marvelous new invention that was to connect their little inland town with the outside world. And the next day, at school, the telephone was the chief topic of their conversation. Nor was it long until the telephone had usurped the place of baseball and other games in their play. Everywhere long lines of twine string, coated with resin and strung on yard fences and mesquite trees, connected neighboring yards, where discarded tomato cans served as transmitters and receivers.

Only two private telephones were at first installed. One of these was in the home of Alfred Barton; the other was in the home of his cousin, Tom Johnson. At once Alfred and Tom found themselves most popular.

They were in the position of the boy who owned the only ball and bat. Everyone was glad to play with him on his own terms. The two boys were besieged with requests for permission to talk over their telephones; so overrun by the eager children were their homes that, at last, in self-defense, Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Johnson arranged a telephone party for them. In two groups, one at each of the two homes, the children assembled, and for the entire evening took turns talking over the telephone.

There was a remarkable similarity in all of the conversations.

"Hello! Hello!"

"Hello! Hello, yourself."

"Who's that?"

"Cain't you guess?"

"Sure; that's Harry."

"That you, Paul Wesley?"

"Yea, it's me, all right. What you all doin' up there?"

"Nothin' much—just talkin'. What you all doin'?"

That was all; their time was up, and they must surrender their places to others in the eager clamoring line. Any effort to monopolize the party called forth a vigorous protest.

CHAPTER 13

A MAN'S MAN

I

PAUL WESLEY and Alfred Barton were perched on top of the shed that formed the rear of the parsonage barn. Their position had been deliberately chosen. They would have preferred the top of the barn itself, right up on the ridge of the roof, but prudence dictated the lower seat. From the shed less could be seen than from the top of the barn, but—and this was the important consideration—on the shed they were out of sight of the parsonage. On this particular afternoon they wished to see but not to be seen.

In the eyes of the church people of their day, horse racing was a capital offense. It was worse even than matched games of baseball, not to be patronized or witnessed by those in good standing in the church or under its tutelage. And this afternoon, if their presence on that roof escaped detection, the Methodist preacher's son and his chum, the Sunday School superintendent's son, were preparing to see a horse race—in fact, a number of horse races.

Immediately back of the parsonage, which was located on the outskirts of Morton, was Captain Black's pasture; a flat, mesquite-covered tableland more than a mile in length and a half mile in width, in the upper

end of which was an improvised race track. There, near the finishing post, one hundred yards from where the boys sat, were many of the young ranchmen and cowpunchers of Morton County, and from the big gate leading from town a steady stream of men and boys was coming to swell the crowd. The fastest cow-ponies in the county, and many from neighboring counties, were entered for the races.

Paul Wesley and Alfred excitedly watched the preparations. It was all new to Paul Wesley, but Alfred recognized many of the horses and their riders as they passed on their way to the starting post.

"There's Bill Thompson—the one ridin' the roan. His horse sure is fast—Bill took him over to the Cowboy's Reunion at Seymour last year and won a whole lot of money on him," Alfred explained to Paul Wesley.

"Do you reckon he'll win today?" Paul Wesley asked, very much impressed by the account of Bill's exploits with the roan.

"Naw, I know he won't—not if he runs against Joe Simpson. Joe's got the fastest pony in the county—maybe in the whole country. Bessie—that's his mare—hasn't never been beat yet—fast as lightnin'. And Colonel Watson from over at Seymour is going to have his horse here to run against Bessie. They say he's got a thousand dollars bet on the race."

"I hope Joe wins, don't you?" Paul Wesley asked eagerly, his partisanship already equal to that of Alfred's.

"Sure, I do; everybody does. There he comes! Look! Yonder, at the gate—there's Joe now. Gee! ain't she a beauty!"

Eager to catch a glimpse of the man of whose wild exploits he had heard so much since his arrival in Morton a little more than a month ago, Paul Wesley turned quickly to look in the direction indicated. He knew that the church people didn't approve of Joe Simpson. He recalled hearing Judge Wright telling his father about Simpson's bad influence in the community. It had something to do with the local option fight. The judge was a prohibitionist and the leader of the local option forces which had recently voted the county dry. Joe Simpson, it seemed, was one of the leaders of the anti forces, an especially hard case, a friend of the saloons and an enemy of the church.

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, Joe Simpson, accompanied by a number of young ranchmen, passed through the gate and rode slowly toward the crowd assembled at the race track. Paul Wesley experienced a feeling of disappointment. Simpson wasn't the sort of man he had expected to see; didn't look like a tough guy. Instead of the half-legendary bad man he had expected, he saw a strikingly handsome young man, not essentially different from the many young ranchmen who lived in and near Morton. But he was not disappointed in the horse. Bessie was all that Alfred had claimed for her, and more. Paul Wesley was

no judge of race horses, but he had no need of expert knowledge to appreciate Bessie.

"What'd I tell you? Ain't she a stepper?" Alfred demanded as Simpson rode past them.

"You bet," Paul Wesley replied. "Wish I could ride her once."

"Yes, you do. Well, it's a lot of good it'll do you—Joe wouldn't let anybody ride her. Say, I bet you don't know why he named her Bessie."

Paul Wesley admitted his ignorance of that important bit of local history.

"He named her for Bessie Wright," Alfred told him, "and, listen, it sure made Judge Wright hoppin' mad—said it was scand'lous to have a race horse named for his daughter."

"But why did he want to name her for Bessie Wright?" Paul Wesley wanted to know.

"Why, 'cause him and Bessie was sweethearts, that's why; and Judge Wright wouldn't let him marry her—cause Joe gets drunk and gambles and won't join the church."

The story of Joe Simpson's thwarted courtship, as he got it, bit by bit, from Alfred Barton between the thrilling events on the race track interested Paul Wesley no little. It was a familiar story in Morton, a small-town classic. Everybody there had known Joe Simpson and Bessie Wright as sweethearts in the old Morton high school, and had been very much surprised, and dis-

appointed as well, when Bessie went off to college to prepare for a career as a music teacher, leaving Joe behind to become the acknowledged leader of a group of young men whose escapades were the subject of much shocked comment in Morton church circles. But even then, years later, Morton had not lost hope that Bessie would marry Joe and settle down at home, for, as more than one sentimentally-minded neighbor sighed, "Joe was so crazy about her, that she might've been able to get him to turn over a new leaf and settle down."

The summer vacations came year after year, bringing Bessie Wright home, to take her accustomed place in the church; and always for those brief periods, Joe was on his good behavior, a regular attendant upon the church services as the escort of the devoted organist and choir leader. Now, however, Morton no longer expected the fulfillment of its hopes. Bessie Wright was looked upon as a confirmed old-maid school teacher, and Joe was regarded as a hard case, for whom there was little hope of regeneration.

As to the merits of the case, there was a sharp divergence of opinion. If you were a church member and a "pro," you sided with the judge and didn't blame him for not wanting his daughter to marry a man like Joe Simpson; you thought Bessie Wright deserved a lot of credit for respecting her father's wishes in the matter. But if, on the other hand, you didn't belong to the church crowd, and believed in personal liberty, the right of every man to take a drink whenever he wanted to, you

wondered how Bessie Wright could be so foolish as to let that stiff-necked, old prohibitionist father of hers, who wanted to regulate everybody's business according to his own notions, keep her from marrying a fine, broad-gauged young fellow like Joe Simpson; you thought, too, that Joe was all sorts of a fool to keep on "hangin' around her."

II

The climax of the racing program was the last half-mile heat between Joe Simpson's Bessie and the Seymour entrant, Colonel Watson's horse. All the other races were but preliminaries to this one. There were two other entrants but they were not considered serious contenders; the contest was between Simpson and Colonel Watson. On their horses the big money was staked. Morton County was backing Bessie to the limit, and Colonel Watson, a big cowman and wealthy landowner, was calling all bets.

As the time for the contest came on, the excitement grew intense. Officially Morton County was dry; but at that race track there was liquor in abundance, more than was usually the case on such an occasion. It was Christmas Eve, and the boys were celebrating. Moreover, they wished to discredit the enforcement of the new local option law.

At last they were off. Four horses, the best of their class in that section of the state, had, at the starter's signal, leaped into full stride, eager for the final test.

Casting prudence to the winds, Paul Wesley and Alfred scrambled to the top of the barn. "Come on, Bessie! Come on, Bessie!" they shouted.

And then, a moment later, as Bessie flashed into the lead, with Colonel Watson's big bay straining at her flank, "She's ahead! She's goin' to beat him!" they cried exultingly.

Two lengths ahead, the mare swept across the line, winner of the big event and acclaimed by her backers the "greatest little piece of hawse flesh in seven states."

Fifty yards past the finishing post, the defeated horses were turned back toward the excited, surging crowd. But Bessie did not return to receive the plaudits of her admirers. Scarcely checking the mare's speed as she swept over the line, Simpson sped on, through the gate and toward town, fanning the air with his hat and yelling at the top of his voice. A moment later no less than one hundred men and boys had mounted and were racing toward town in pursuit of their exultant leader.

"They're goin' to town; come on, let's go," Alfred urged. "Gosh, I bet they're goin' to raise Cain now," he prophesied as they climbed down from the barn and started running toward town.

One hundred yards ahead of the crowd, Simpson dashed into the main street. Then, whipping out his revolver, he fired into the air. Six sharp reports from the smoking gun shattered the quiet pervading the almost deserted square as he raced past the courthouse. Then brandishing the empty revolver above his head

and whooping exultingly, he circled the square and came back onto the main street.

In the meantime, Sheriff Eubanks had hurriedly left his office and appeared in the courthouse yard. With a glance he took in the situation, and immediately prepared for action. At any other time Simpson's exhibition of reckless bravado might have been overlooked. On former Christmas occasions, exhilarated young men had indulged their fancy to shoot up the town. Then the officers had either tolerantly failed to take any notice of the outburst of wild and woolly spirit or had quietly locked up the too vociferous and over-stimulated disturbers of the peace until such time as they were peaceably inclined. But this outbreak was, in the eyes of the new prohibition sheriff, altogether different. It was nothing short of a direct challenge to him and to the law which he had promised to enforce at all odds.

As Simpson completed the round of the square, Sheriff Eubanks stepped out into the middle of the street and commanded him to halt. But Simpson either failed to take the order seriously or was too reckless to obey. "Go to hell," he shouted in answer to the officer's order, as he wheeled his horse and dashed off down the street.

The sheriff rushed over to the hitching rail in front of the courthouse where his own horse was tied. He mounted and spurred off in pursuit. By that time Simpson was two hundred yards away. Looking back over his shoulder, he saw the pursuing officer. Even

then he did not appear to take the matter seriously; apparently he thought of it only as an opportunity to have some fun at the expense of Sheriff Eubanks. If the sheriff wanted to race, he was perfectly willing to accommodate him. So he rode on at a slow gallop until the officer came close up behind him. Then, gradually increasing his speed, he kept just ahead and out of the reach of the officer.

For two hundred yards perhaps the race continued. Simpson easily maintained his lead over the heavier and slower horse on which the sheriff was mounted, all the while looking back over his shoulder and taunting the officer. Then Sheriff Eubanks, exasperated by his inability to overtake his man, and stung by Simpson's provocative taunts, drew his revolver and fired.

From the square, it appeared that he had fired at the ground, simply as a warning to Simpson. At the report of the gun, the mare leaped forward into full speed. Simpson, convinced that it was now time to bring the race to an end, let her have her head. The sheriff, left far behind, gave up the chase and rode back to town.

When he saw that Sheriff Eubanks had abandoned the pursuit, Simpson pulled his mare down to a gallop and rode off home. At his front gate he dismounted. He had scarcely touched the ground before the mare sank down on her knees and then rolled over on her side, lifeless.

Simpson was dumbfounded. For a moment he could

not realize what had happened. Then he saw. There in the saddle blanket, just back of the saddle skirt, was a small round hole. He raised the corner of the blanket, and what he saw explained all. The sheriff's bullet had penetrated the mare's back, just in front of the hip joint, and had ranged downward, missing a vital part but causing internal hemorrhage. Thus she had carried her rider home, only to fall dead at his feet at the end of the run.

He dropped the blanket. Then he realized that his fingers felt damp. He looked at them. They were wet, stained with the life-blood of his beautiful mare. It was incredible. He could not conceive of a man's shooting such a beautiful animal. It was easier for him to think of his shooting another man. Then a murderous rage flamed up in his brain. Until then he had had no desire or intention to harm anyone. Flushed with victory, and somewhat over-stimulated, he had simply given vent to his feelings in an outburst of a sort not at all uncommon in that section of the state at that time. But now it was different. He was ready to kill. Arming himself with a Winchester rifle, he hurried to the barn, saddled another horse, and rode off at top speed toward town.

By this time Morton was seething with excitement. Practically the entire male population was on the street, discussing the affair. Over in front of the courthouse, where the crestfallen sheriff had dismounted, a group of his friends and partisans surrounded him, urgently

counselling him to go after Simpson and arrest him at once. Judge Wright was the spokesman of this group. He regarded Simpson's conduct as an outrageous defiance of the law and those charged with its enforcement.

"We can't afford to let him off," he declared vehemently, in reply to a suggestion that the matter be overlooked for the present at least. "No, sir," he said, turning to the sheriff, "if you don't go and arrest him right now, we might as well admit that we can't enforce the law and turn things over to that bunch of hoodlums." The bunch of hoodlums to whom the judge contemptuously referred were the friends and partisans of Joe Simpson, assembled on the porch of "Doc" Wilson's drug store, headquarters of the anti crowd, from which every moment or so a derisive "whoop-ee!" was hurled at the group in the street.

"No, siree," Judge Wright insisted, "he's got to recognize the supremacy of the law in this town. I don't care if he is drunk; he's got no right to ride through these streets, firing off his pistol. No, sir, he's just trying to show us that he don't intend to obey the prohibition law. Come on, Sheriff, let's fix up the papers——"

At that moment, a block away, the alarm was sounded. "Look out there! Here comes Joe—with a Winchester." And, too late to accomplish their purpose, a number of men rushed into the street with the intention of stopping Simpson.

In front of the courthouse Sheriff Eubanks waited—alone. His vociferous supporters of a few moments before, with Judge Wright in the lead, had taken to the courthouse for cover.

Scarcely checking his horse as he approached the officer, Simpson fired. The bullet missed its mark, imbedding itself in a post near which the sheriff stood. Sheriff Eubanks' forty-five roared an answer to the sharp crack of the rifle. Then once more the Winchester cracked, and a gaping hole appeared in the sheriff's high-crowned Stetson hat, but the officer was unhurt. Again the forty-five responded; and Joe Simpson's left arm dangled helpless at his side.

Dropping his rifle, the wounded man sought to regain control of his horse which was now making a headlong dash down the street. A block away he brought him to a stop; then he turned and rode back to "Doc" Wilson's drug store, where his friends helped him to dismount and led him inside for medical attention.

III

It was a critical moment in the life of the little town. One thoughtless word or one rash move on the part of either side, and the two hostile factions would be swept into a deadly feud. In the drug store, Simpson's partisans were milling around, making threats of reprisal, eager to have it out with the sheriff and his supporters. In the courthouse Sheriff Eubanks, with Judge Wright and others of their faction, were apprehensively await-

ing developments. The more hot-headed of the group were for having the sheriff put Simpson under arrest at once. It would never do, they argued, for his serious breach of the peace to be condoned. But, fortunately, others, more level-headed, prevented hasty and ill-timed action, while "Doc" Wilson had an opportunity to obtain control of his clan.

It was finally agreed that, although the law must be vindicated by the arrest of Simpson, it would not be wise for the sheriff to make the arrest. Squire Martin's statement that "if he goes in there after Joe, he'll never come out alive" was accepted as summing up the real situation. Someone must be found who could serve the warrant without precipitating bloodshed. But who was the man to do that? Several possibilities were considered and dismissed. Almost everyone, it seemed, was too closely allied with one or the other of the two factions. At last the name of the new Methodist preacher was suggested. "Get Brother Polk to serve it. They'll respect a minister of the Gospel, and won't start any trouble," said several. This met with the approval of the supporters of the law, and a messenger was sent to request the pastor to come to the courthouse.

Twenty minutes later, after a brief conference with Judge Wright and Sheriff Eubanks, the minister came out of the judge's office. At the door of the courthouse, where he had been waiting throughout the conference, Paul Wesley met him.

"Papa, are you goin' to arrest Joe Simpson?" he

asked in an awed voice, as he fell in beside the tall, commanding figure of his father. It was a great moment for him—his father, Brother Polk, called upon to arrest Joe Simpson—to do what Sheriff Eubanks or Judge Wright didn't dare to do!

"Yes, son; at the request of Judge Wright, I'm going to serve the warrant."

"Aren't you scared to go over there after him?" the boy asked. "What if he pulls his gun on you? You haven't got a gun, have you?"

"No," Brother Polk replied, "I'm unarmed, but I'm in no danger whatever, I think."

At the courthouse gate, just across from the drug store, his father told Paul Wesley, "You stay here; you had better not go any farther."

Then Paul Wesley watched his father cross the street, step up on the porch, speak calmly to the surprised group of men congregated there, and then go inside the building. It was one of the proudest moments in his life. In his boyish eyes, the man who went into that drug store, to demand in the name of the law the surrender of Joe Simpson, was much more than a preacher—he was at that moment a man among men. And, when five minutes later, he saw Brother Polk and "Doc" Wilson, with Simpson between them, come out, walk across the street and disappear in Judge Wright's office, Paul Wesley held his father in higher esteem as a man than ever before in his life.

CHAPTER 14

EMBARRASSING MOMENTS

I

IN the afternoon of the last day of the school year, Paul Wesley, Ralph Baxter, and Alfred Barton were in the rear of Mr. Baxter's grocery and general merchandise store. They were awaiting the return of Bob Baker and Frank Wilson who were delivering notes for two young men, asking the privilege of accompanying their young lady friends to the school closing exhibition that evening. Paul Wesley and Alfred had just returned from similar errands. Ralph was supposed to be helping his father by looking after the post office, which was located in the front end of the store. However, his duties there were not so pressing but that he could find much time for visiting with his friends in the rear of his father's place.

"I believe I'll send my girl a note, and take her to the exhibition tonight," Paul Wesley announced to Alfred during one of Ralph's absences.

"Huh, I guess you won't neither."

"Why won't I? You don't think I'm afraid to, do you?"

"I don't *think* so; I *know* you are," Alfred retorted.

Just then Bob Baker came in and took a seat on a sugar barrel. "Geel but it's hot. It must be a mile

over to Walker's, where I carried Mr. John's note—and he just gimme a dime too——”

“Say, Bob, what you think Paul Wesley says he's goin' to do?” Alfred interrupted Bob's complaint.

“Don't know. What?” Bob replied indifferently.

“Says he's goin' to send his girl a note and ask her to go to the exhibition with him.”

“Yes, he will. I see him sendin' a note to Edna Baxter. Mrs. Baxter'd make him wish he hadn't, if he did,” Bob scoffed.

“Huh, that's all you know about it. What'll you bet I won't?” Paul Wesley retorted.

“I'll bet you a dime—a dollar—anything——”

At that moment Mr. Baxter and a customer came in. The conversation was suspended while the boys watched the merchant complete the sale of ten pounds of sugar and a side of bacon.

Up to this time Paul Wesley had given little thought to girls and affairs dominated by feminine influence. Outdoor sports, especially baseball, had been his chief interest. True, he had had two or three mild cases—the one at Elliston with Helen Thomas, and similar, short-lived ones elsewhere, but those affairs had not seriously challenged his interest in baseball. It was some time after his arrival in Morton before he became interested in girls. Saint Valentine's Day marked the turning point in this respect.

On that day there was delivered at the parsonage, in a roundabout and rather mysterious manner, a package

addressed to Mr. Paul Wesley Polk. When he got home from school that afternoon, his mother handed the parcel to him.

"See what somebody sent you," she said. "It must be a valentine."

"Huh, I don't want it, if it is," Paul Wesley replied, assuming an air of utter indifference to such things as valentines.

"Why don't you open it and see who sent it?"

Now, that was just what he did not want to do. He preferred to investigate the contents of that mysterious package alone, but, seeing no plausible way of escape, he untied the ribbon and disclosed the contents of the box.

It was a valentine! Such a valentine as he had never before received, or expected to receive. It was a real, sure-enough, store-bought valentine—one of the largest and most gorgeous of the fancy stock that had been on display in the Baxter show cases for the past two weeks; a marvelous creation of hearts and love knots and cupids, dedicated in flowing verse to "My Valentine."

He could hardly bring himself to believe that it was meant for him. But there could be no mistake about it, for there was his name, plainly if not Spencerianly, written on the box, and near the point of the great red heart that formed the base of the marvelous creation was her name—"Edna." That was the most surprising thing about it—that Edna Baxter should have sent it to him. The Baxters, members of the Methodist Church

and prominent in local church affairs, lived near the parsonage. Edna, the oldest of the children, was then a tall, slender—"spindlin," Morton described her—girl of Paul Wesley's age. She was very fair, slightly freckled, red-headed and of a timid disposition. Her natural timidity, accentuated by an acute consciousness of her freckles and red hair, caused her to be regarded by the boys and girls of Morton as somewhat stand-offish or, as they expressed it, "stuck-up." Apparently, she had no sentimental interest in boys. She had never "made up" with a boy, or evinced any desire to do so.

The poet, from whom the lines were borrowed, had written "To my Valentine," but Paul Wesley read it, "To MY valentine."

"She sent it to me," he repeated over and over, as if to convince himself of that significant fact and to assure a doubting world. In a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—an awkward, over-tall, long-legged youngster had been metamorphosed. A golden-haired princess had touched him with her scepter and dubbed him her Knight of Saint Valentine! That valentine was a large one—large even for its day and generation—but Paul Wesley contrived somehow to secrete it about his person and to snatch many delightful glances at it as he went about doing the many chores required of him that evening.

That was the beginning. Thenceforth play parties were almost as important as baseball. Now Edna was *his* girl, and when a game of "Good-Night" was an-

nounced, he was as eager as anyone. Admitted in his turn into the room where the girls were ranged around the walls, each one standing behind a chair and inviting the young men to be seated, he knew full well which chair he must choose if he would not be "clapped out." He knew that if he "guessed right," it would be his privilege to take Edna for a short stroll in the moonlight. And, likewise, when it was the boys' turn to stand behind the chairs and clap in and clap out the young ladies, there was no doubt in Edna's mind as to which chair she would sit in. She might, with becoming modesty, seem to hesitate and to be uncertain as to the choice, but in the end she would choose Paul Wesley's chair; and again, time after time, they would go strolling arm in arm, up and down the road—a privilege they enjoyed on no other occasion.

II

When the boys found themselves again in undisturbed possession of the rear of the store, a very frank discussion of Paul Wesley's daring proposal ensued. They believed he was bluffing, and frankly told him so. And he was bluffing; he had no reason to think that Mrs. Baxter, or even his own parents, would countenance his proposed engagement; but he did not care to admit that to his scoffing companions.

"You guys needn't think just 'cause you are scared to send a note to your girls that I am," he derided. "You

haven't got the nerve; that's all's the matter with you." He was beginning to think that he really would like to send Edna a note, just to show them how brave and venturesome he was.

"Come on, let's all send one," he urged. "I'll back you out trying it."

"Aw shucks! You know they wouldn't go with us," Alfred demurred. "Their mamas wouldn't let 'em."

"Well, then, it wouldn't do any harm to write 'em, and it'd be fun to see what they would say," Paul Wesley insisted.

"Yes, it would! And have everybody laughin' at us," Bob countered. "That'd be lots of fun, wouldn't it?"

"I told you you didn't have the nerve to do it," Paul Wesley came back at him. "Come on. I'm goin' to write one, if you don't."

One after the other they agreed to it. For some time they had wanted to make such a venture, and the present occasion seemed to offer a favorable opportunity. Their appearance with their young lady friends at a school affair would not, they thought, attract as much attention as elsewhere. Each of them bound himself by a solemn oath not to back out.

Then the question as to who should write the notes arose. They debated that question. At last it was agreed that, since Paul Wesley was responsible for the venture, it was his business to put it through. Reluctantly Paul Wesley consented to write the notes. From Mr. Baxter's office a supply of the firm's highly

embellished stationery was secured, and, with a sugar barrel serving for a desk, Paul Wesley began.

"Which one must I write first?" he inquired, not for information but to gain time and to cover up his embarrassment. His task was more difficult than he had expected. He didn't even know how to begin.

"Why, write your own first. You started it," Bob admonished him.

—"Miss Edna Baxter," he wrote, and then stopped. He tore up the sheet and made a fresh start. But again the name was as far as he could go.

"Aw, go on and write somethin'. It'll take all day, the way you're doin'," Alfred complained. "Just tell 'er you want to take her to the closin' exhibition."

With that advice he made another start. But that wouldn't do. The occasion demanded something more formal than a simple request to take a girl to the entertainment. Just what it did require he had no idea.

Realizing that they were making no progress, they appealed to Mr. Ed, a clerk in Mr. Baxter's employ, for assistance. Seating himself at the office desk, the young man inquired the name of the young lady to whom the note was to be addressed.

No one volunteered the desired information.

"I've got to have the young lady's name," he insisted.

"Why, just make up a name—just any name you can think of," Paul Wesley suggested.

With an elaborate flourish of the pen, the fictitious note to a fictitious young lady was finished and sub-

scribed. Then Mr. Ed read aloud the product of his social and literary efforts:

Miss Mary Ann Jones,
City.

My dear Miss Jones:

Mr. John Henry Smith presents his compliments, and desires the pleasure of your company at the Commencement Exercises of the college this evening, Friday, May 24th.

Respectfully yours,
John Henry Smith.

Greatly impressed, they rushed back to their place in the rear of the store. Presently five notes, in Paul Wesley's best copybook style and identical in all respects, except the names, were ready for delivery. Then another problem arose. How were the notes to be delivered?

"Get some little kids to take them," Bob suggested.

"Do you reckon we could get 'em to do it? Wouldn't they want us to pay 'em for it?" Alfred questioned.

"Sure, we can. And we won't have to pay 'em nothin' either," Frank Wilson assured them. "I'll tell you what—me'n Paul Wesley can make our little buds take 'em, cain't we, Paul Wesley?"

Paul Wesley agreed that he could command the services of his younger brother, but on second thought, he questioned the expediency of that course of procedure. "Why, those kids'd tell everybody in town," he said, giving expression to his doubts as to the wisdom of taking the younger boys into their confidence.

That was a contingency they had overlooked. Any number of embarrassing consequences might follow their calling upon the youngsters for assistance in their delicate undertaking. They agreed with Paul Wesley that the less publicity their venture was given, the better it might be for themselves. In the end, they decided to divide the work among themselves, and Paul Wesley was delegated to wait at the store and receive the replies. None of the girls' notes, it was understood, was to be opened until all the replies were received.

Alfred was the first to report. "Mrs. McKenzie came to the door, and I ask'd her if she'd give Bob's note to Bertha; then she said, 'What sort of foolishness is this anyway?' She looked mad as all git out and I was scared, so I told her it was a note from Bob, wantin' to take Bertha to the exhibition tonight."

"Well, what did she do then?" Bob impatiently demanded.

"Why, she tore it open and read it," Alfred continued. "And then she got madder'n ever—told me to go back and tell Bob Baker he'd better mind his own business after this and not be tryin' any more of his monkeyshines on her. Said she didn't propose to have no girl of hers goin' to a school exhibition with him."

Frank's report was almost equally discouraging. The mothers of the two young ladies to whom he delivered notes had summarily dismissed him without formal replies. Only two written replies were received. One was from Mary Thomas, addressed to Frank Wilson;

the other one was from Edna Baxter. Paul Wesley read Mary's note. It was in the handwriting of Mary but in the words of Mrs. Thomas, gracefully acknowledging the receipt of Mr. Wilson's compliments but declining his invitation. Then it was his turn to open Edna's note. Paul Wesley felt that the best he could hope for would be an answer similar to Mary Thomas'. He now no longer expected, or hoped for, an affirmative response. In fact, he felt that such a response would be most unfortunate for himself. He made an ineffectual attempt to evade opening the note in the presence of the other boys.

"I guess there isn't any use readin' this one," he said. "I believe I'll just tear it up——"

"No you won't either," they protested vigorously. "You got to read it. You heard what they said about ours, and we're goin' to hear what Edna says about yours."

Realizing the futility of trying to avoid reading the note to them, he opened the envelope and scanned the half-dozen lines addressed to him:

Mr. Paul Wesley Polk,
City.

Miss Edna Baxter acknowledges receipt of Mr. Paul Wesley Polk's compliments, and will be pleased to accompany him to the Commencement Exercises this evening.

Respectfully yours,
Edna Baxter.

It was incredible! Surely she didn't mean it. Now what was he going to do? His mind leaped forward and visioned with startling clearness the probable consequences of his rashness.

"Well, what'd she say? Can't you read?" Bob demanded.

Their insistence brought him back to the present moment, and he read the note to them.

"Say, I don't believe it says that—you're just makin' it up," Bob declared.

"All right, read it yourself, if you don't believe it," Paul Wesley retorted, passing the note over to him.

A glance confirmed Paul Wesley's words. "That's what it says, fellers—she says she'll go to the exhibition with him," Bob announced.

He had scored on them. And for a moment they were silent, unconsciously paying a tribute to his triumph. Paul Wesley sensed the significance of their silence, and, rising to the occasion, demanded: "Well, what else did you 'spect? Didn't I tell you I was goin' to take her to the exhibition?"

He had them there. They knew that his success was as much a surprise to him as it was to them, but they had not sufficiently recovered to start a counter attack. In another moment, however, they would strike back and take him off his perch.

Alfred was the first to open fire. "Gosh, a'mighty, but you sure are in it now. I wouldn't be in your place for anything."

Bob followed Alfred's lead. "What you goin' to do, Paul Wesley? You ain't goin' to take her to that exhibition—before all them folks—are you?"

"Course, I am," Paul Wesley asserted. "What do you s'pose I sent the note for, if I didn't want to take her?"

"Well, I'm awful glad Mrs. Thomas wouldn't let Mary go with me," Frank Wilson put in. "I'd sure hate to have to walk down that aisle, right in front of all the folks that'll be there tonight—Say, fellers, let's get there early and see him come in."

"Oh, yes, you guys are just sore 'cause your girls wouldn't go with you—that's all's the matter with you," Paul Wesley struck back. He knew their present attitude was largely inspired by jealousy, but, at the same time, he realized the truth in their words. It was not a pleasant prospect that he faced.

With that parting shot, Paul Wesley started off home. It was time, he felt, for him to get off to himself and take stock of the situation. "So long, fellers; see you tonight," he said with an assumption of utter unconcern that belied his real feelings as he stalked out of the store.

III

Two hours later he was at the Baxter front gate. In the parlor a light was shining, and from an open window came the sound of voices, laughing and talking. He felt certain that the entire Baxter family was assem-

bled in the parlor, and he was tempted to beat a retreat. He had no desire to face another family group; his experience at home, where his father had teased him all through supper and while he dressed for the evening's adventure, had been entirely sufficient in that respect. But a moment's reflection told him that it was now too late to withdraw; so, mustering up all the courage at his command, he resolved to face Mr. Baxter and his family with the best grace possible.

It was with no little difficulty that he opened the gate. His hand was unsteady. His fingers fumbled the latch. Try as he might he could not prevent the gate from creaking on its hinges. He was quite sure that everybody in the neighborhood heard it, and knew just why that gate was being opened at that particular moment.

In response to his timid knock, the door was opened by Miss Annie, Edna's aunt, who lived with the Baxters. "Come right in, Mr. Polk," she greeted him. As she ushered him in, she announced, "Young ladies, here is Mr. Polk."

He was relieved to find that Mr. and Mrs. Baxter were not present, but he was surprised and confused to discover two of Edna's girl friends there. The young ladies had driven in from their ranch home early and, unaware of Edna's previous engagement, had dropped in to accompany her to the exercises. Taking the first chair that offered, he seated himself near the center of the room, facing the door and almost directly in front

of the sofa on which the visitors sat, with Edna between them. Miss Annie seated herself and attempted to lead the youngsters into conversation, but with little success. The girls had little to say aloud, it seemed, and Paul Wesley returned only stiff monosyllabic replies to her questions and observations. He was extremely uncomfortable and ill at ease. Behind him, as he listened to Miss Annie's polite chatter, he could hear occasional giggles, and once he thought he heard someone crying. He would have liked to bolt, but he was not at all certain that he could get up and walk out of that room, should he try. No, he was fixed in that chair until some force outside his own volition should remove him. Already, it seemed that he had been there hours and hours.

It was the chaperon who started them off. "I expect it is time for you to start to the college," she told them. "Edna, run and get your hat. You and Paul Wesley start on ahead of us. We'll be along in a few minutes."

The front door closed behind them. Out there in the intimacy of the gathering darkness, their timidity and embarrassment disappeared. Then it was as if they were starting off for a stroll at one of their play parties. In his best party manner, Paul Wesley invited his lady to "have a wing"; and, arm in arm, they made their way to the school building.

Just inside the door, instinctively moving a little apart, they stopped and anxiously looked about for convenient seats. Embarrassed and confused, it looked to

them as if there were no seats at all, as if all the people they had ever known were crowded into that auditorium.

Then they were discovered.

"There they are now!" a boyish voice up near the front shouted. "Look! Look! Yonder they are."

At once all eyes were turned upon them, and all over the room children were standing up, staring, pointing, calling out greetings of one sort or another, making it all the more difficult for them to find seats. Then Edna, who had been standing in the doorway, blushing furiously and growing more and more embarrassed and self-conscious, spied a group of girl friends about half way down the center aisle, with a vacant seat among them. To her that seat appeared irresistibly desirable. Abandoning her escort to his fate, she darted to it.

Paul Wesley turned around just in time to see her settling down into the seat, halfway down the length of the long row of girls. He started to follow her, but that benchful of giggling girls appeared entirely too formidable. He stood there a moment, hesitating, not knowing whether to advance or retreat; then he turned, crossed to the other side of the aisle and squeezed himself into a seat among a group of boys. But had he known what he was doing he would never have chosen that seat; for right there on the next bench, directly in front, sat his father and mother.

"Why, son, where is your young lady friend?" his father turned around and solicitously inquired a mo-

ment later. "I understood that you had an engagement this evening," he added with a chuckle.

Fortunately for the unhappy boy, Professor Lawson appeared at that moment on the platform and announced the first number on the program. The curtain went up, and the attention of the audience shifted to the scenes on the stage.

CHAPTER 15

THE BARRIER

I

A REVIVAL meeting was always the occasion for a crisis in the life of Paul Wesley. He was unusually susceptible to the religious forces and influences unleashed on such an occasion. At the age of seven he joined the church. He had never been very sinful in thought or action, but he realized that he had never been converted. Always when he found himself in the midst of the stirring emotional scenes of one of his father's protracted meetings, he was acutely conscious of a desire to experience that mysterious, spiritual change which was described as conversion.

Time and again had he seen penitents kneeling at the altar suddenly lay hold of something beyond and outside themselves and leap to their feet, exultantly happy, shouting and glorifying a Savior who had released them from the grip of sin and fear. On many occasions he had seen those, who a few moments before were under conviction, in the depths of despair, suddenly transformed into exhorters of their fellows to turn away from their sins and get right with God. Thus had he become convinced that it was necessary to experience such a conversion before one could know of a certainty that he was a Christian.

Often he was tempted to join the penitents at the altar and seek the witness of the Spirit. He wanted to be converted; but whenever he was impelled to seek that experience in the way others sought and obtained it, he found unusual obstacles in his way. He was supposed to be a Christian, having already made a public profession of faith; he was, therefore, expected by his father and the church people to classify himself as such whenever opportunity offered. Under all circumstances and on all occasions, when a public profession was called for, his relation to the church imposed upon him the responsibility of lining up on the right side. And his failure so to classify himself, he knew full well, would be embarrassing to his parents and compromising in the eyes of the congregation.

Once when he had accompanied his father to one of his Sunday afternoon appointments Paul Wesley had learned what a public admission of his unconverted state would mean to his father and to himself. At the conclusion of the sermon Brother Polk invited all those present who felt that they were not right with God and desired the prayers of the church in their behalf to stand up. Moved by the impulse of a genuine desire for a more satisfactory spiritual experience, Paul Wesley arose with others who accepted that invitation. When the service was over and they were driving homeward, his father asked, "Son, why did you stand just now, when those who were not Christians were asked to stand up?"

Paul Wesley made no reply. He wanted to explain why he had accepted the invitation; to tell, once in his life, the truth about his spiritual state, but he could not do it. To a stranger—to another minister, perhaps—he might have done so; but he could not talk with his father about such things. He respected him, even loved him, but he could not talk to him of his intimate personal problems. They did not occupy common ground; they were miles and miles apart. The father lived in one world; the son, in another; and it was impossible in that brief moment to bridge the gulf between.

"You are a Christian, aren't you?" his father questioned. "You don't consider yourself a sinner, do you?"

"No, sir; I——"

"Then you shouldn't place yourself and me in the wrong light," his father gravely replied. "I was very much surprised, for I have always thought you were on the right side. But, of course, if you don't feel that way, you should ask God to give you strength to live as a Christian boy should."

Paul Wesley realized that he was permitting his father to be deceived by his equivocal answer; he wanted to tell him that he had misinterpreted his incomplete reply, but words of explanation would not come at his command, so he concluded that it might be better to let the matter stand as it was. His father seemed satisfied. To tell him the truth would only be painful to him. So, taking the easiest way out of the embarrassing situation, he remained silent. But there-

after he was to know that any public effort to adjust himself to Christian standards would prove embarrassing. Unwittingly the father had raised a barrier to his boy's spiritual progress.

II

Judged by its religious fervor and the number of conversions, the Dripping Springs revival was a remarkable success. "Never in their lives," the oldest members of the church declared, "had they witnessed a more remarkable 'outpouring of the Spirit.' It was," they averred, "a real 'Pentecostal revival'." Paul Wesley was deeply impressed, unusually so. Again he felt the prompting to follow the example of those whom he saw partaking of such wonderful and satisfying religious experiences. The heart-searching sermons, the appealing songs, and the fervent prayers in behalf of the unsaved were re-enforced in his case by an unusually strong personal influence.

The revivalist whom his father had secured to assist him in the meeting was Brother Allen. And of all the averred, "a real 'Pentecostal revival'." Paul Wesley held Brother Allen in the highest esteem; his feeling being inspired by the fact that Brother Allen had been a successful lawyer before entering the ministry. A Methodist preacher who had been an accomplished member of the legal profession commanded Paul Wesley's respect. Such a man was, in the boy's opinion, almost in a class by himself. He thought that a man

who could turn his back on a lucrative law practice to take up the work of the Methodist ministry must have gotten a strong dose of religion. So, when the revivalist in his sincere and straightforward manner, urged his hearers to repent of their sins and accept the call of mercy, Paul Wesley was deeply moved; and, more than ever, wished to put himself in the right attitude before God and man.

That impulse became at last too strong to resist. He went forward and knelt at the altar, a suppliant for Divine Grace. To that point he was swept by the high tide of religious emotion that the meeting had evoked, but that was as far as he was to go. At that point obstacles, born of his experiences as the preacher's boy, blocked his advance. At the altar of the church which his father served, on the very threshold perhaps of a full and complete religious experience, the terms on which he might obtain assurance of salvation—nor were there any alternative terms, as he understood the proposition—were presented to him. Essentially those terms, as he interpreted them, were: a willingness to give up anything and everything one might hold dear that was contrary to the Divine plan, an absolute surrender of his will to the Divine guidance, and a willingness to accept any responsibility that the Christian life might entail.

“Just give it all up, my boy; you must be willing to give up everything and put your trust in Christ alone.”

Thus was the kneeling boy exhorted by one of the personal workers.

That was the first essential step. He must give it all up. Getting religion and giving up things were, he thought, inseparably linked together.

His father came and knelt down beside him in the straw that covered the altar space. "What is it that is in your way, son?" he asked gently. And as Paul Wesley made no reply, he continued: "You must make a complete surrender—be willing to give up everything for Christ's sake. Take hold of the promises of eternal life—say 'Here I am; I renounce it all; I put my trust in Thee and in thy redeeming blood'——"

Above his father's voice, urging him to surrender his life to Divine guidance, he could hear the congregation singing:

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

It was all very confusing. How, even if one were really willing to give up everything, did he make a complete surrender? That was the question; was he really willing to do that? And how, he wondered, did one lay hold of the promises? Perhaps he would be willing to give up everything, if he could only be sure that such a surrender would result in his conversion. But would it? He wasn't sure; he was tempted to put

it to the test—to say: “All right, I’ll do it; I’ll give it all up if only You’ll convince me.” A prayer—it must be a prayer, he felt—was forming itself in his mind: “Oh, Lord, if there is a God, help me to believe it. I’ll give it up—everything—if only——” But he could not utter it. He was afraid to. What if the Lord should take him up on that proposition!

Surrender! Give it all up! That was the burden of it all—songs, prayers, and exhortations. What was there in his young life inconsistent with the Divine will? He reviewed the memories of his life—the things he held dear; the half-formed ambitions he cherished—for the sinful pleasures that stood in his way and which he must renounce.

Well, there was baseball. That was a sinful pleasure; at least his father so considered it. Therefore, baseball must be inconsistent with the Divine will, and he would have to give it up to be saved. But was he willing to do that—to pay that price for salvation, immediate salvation?

Thus he debated, unresolved, holding back, going over and over the same old ground, while the service was prolonged and many of those who had accompanied him to the altar joyously professed religion and were acclaimed redeemed souls by friends and relatives, shouting and singing their thanks to God for his saving grace and redeeming love. Only a handful of penitents who, like himself, were unable to break the

bonds of their unbelief or to bring themselves to the necessary renunciation of the pleasures of the world remained.

They were singing again:

“Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee!”

And, listening to that noble hymn of consecration, he wondered what it would mean to let the Lord take his life, to order it as He saw fit. What might he have to do, if he should turn over to Him the direction of his life? Would he have to preach? Yes, he might have to do that. He had often feared that he had been called to preach. And he did not want to be a preacher when he grew up. No, he wanted to be a lawyer, to make a lot of money, and to occupy exalted positions in the world—positions that only lawyers were qualified to fill. If, then, the Lord had really called him to preach, was he willing to give up his ambition and become a preacher—a Methodist preacher, for example, like his father—and to accept the life of self-denial and hardships that such a career seemed to entail? Was he willing to do that as the price of his conversion——? That, he knew, was the question he must answer now.

The hour was late; it was time for the service to close. It had been a great night in Zion. The highest heights of religious experience had been attained. Now the reaction was setting in; ministers, exhorters, singers,

personal workers—all of them—were weary, physically, and spiritually exhausted. It was necessary to bring the meeting to a close in order that they might refresh themselves for the next day's services. But there were penitents at the altar, brands to be snatched from the burning. And tomorrow night might be too late! Now was the accepted time. The visiting minister left the arbor to seek his place of repose for the night; fathers and mothers were constrained to leave with their tired and sleepy children. But a small handful of faithful workers remained. They wondered at the hardness of heart of those unredeemed souls, but would not desert them. In the dark night of their unbelief they would hold aloft the saving torch of faith and make intercessions at a throne of Grace in their behalf.

The arbor was deserted at last except for a little group of workers clustered about the altar. The night breezes fanned the flickering kerosene torches. Some of the lights had already sputtered and gone out. The stillness of deep night was settling down on the camp. Song followed prayer; prayer and song and personal intercession. Now the weary group implored the Holy Spirit:

“Come, Holy Spirit, come,
With energy Divine,
And on this poor, benighted soul,
With beams of mercy shine.”

And then, in a closing effort to force the surrender of rebellious hearts and wills, they sang:

“Stay, thou insulted Spirit, stay!
Though I have done thee such despite;
Nor cast the sinner quite away
Nor take thine everlasting flight.”

Why should he longer delay? The proposition was complete, clear-cut. There was no mistaking its terms: on the one side, his will; on the other, the Divine will. He must accept it or reject it. But if he should reject it—hadn't he already done so, for that matter?—would that insulted Spirit stay its everlasting flight? Was the avenging sword of an outraged Spirit even then suspended above his head, awaiting his decision?

It was a terrifying thought—to defy the Spirit that might take its flight and leave one to utter, eternal darkness. He recalled references in his father's sermons to the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost. What, he wondered, was that unpardonable offense for which no belated plea for mercy would ever avail? Didn't it have something to do with rejecting the offer of salvation? Maybe so; he wasn't sure. Oh, that was the whole trouble with him—he wasn't sure about any of it; and he was afraid to put it to the only test that would tell him whether it were true or not. It might be true, and then he'd be bound—too late to withdraw!

He was tired. His knees were stiff and sore from

long kneeling on the ground. He shifted his weight from one knee to the other, sprawling on the bench in front of him. And he was growing sleepy. Would they ever close the service and let him go to bed? The issue of salvation was losing its urgency. The words of the workers, in song and prayer, seemed to be receding, to be coming to him from an ever-increasing distance.

A final prayer in behalf of the unsaved penitents at the altar—that they might not be cut off in their unbelief; that the shackles of sin might be broken, the unseeing eyes be made to see, and the deaf ears opened before it was everlastingly too late—brought the service to a close. Paul Wesley, emotionally exhausted, stumbled out from under the arbor into the darkness outside. He was glad to get away from it all, to be alone. So far as he was concerned, for the present at least, the die was cast. He had faced the hour of decision and had found his pathway blocked. He could not, or would not, go farther. There was no need for him to kneel again at the altar of his father's church; the church could do nothing for him until he was willing to pay the price of his salvation.

CHAPTER 16

MARJORIE

I

AT the close of the first year of the Morton pastorate, the Annual Conference met at Brownwood. Paul Wesley accompanied his father on the one hundred and fifty mile overland trip. For weeks he had eagerly looked forward to the trip and to the visit to the city. Brownwood was then a town of only five thousand population, but Paul Wesley, contrasting it with the little inland towns in which he had always lived, thought of it as a city. Except for one visit to the Dallas Fair, when he was quite young, he had never visited a large town or city.

They set out early Thursday morning. All that day they were in familiar territory, where Brother Polk knew many of the people and could, as he told Paul Wesley, "borrow meal" most anywhere they might stop. But the next day found them in a sparsely settled and unfamiliar section, where an occasional ranch house and the scattered dugout homes of squatters offered the only opportunities for entertainment. As the noon hour approached, they stopped at the first ranch house that appeared promising. Driving up to the front gate, Brother Polk called out, "Hello!" Presently a man appeared on the front porch and inquired what was

wanted. His attitude was not very cordial or hospitable, but when he was informed that the travelers wanted dinner he grudgingly consented to see if he could stir up something. Explaining his apparent inhospitality, he added, "The old woman's been mighty poorly lately and we ain't been doin' much cookin'."

Presently they were informed that their dinner was ready. Hungry from their long drive, they lost no time in accepting the invitation to "set down and help yoreself to such as 'tis." And such a dinner as it was!—the remains of an opossum, cold, grease-covered; a few chunks of cold, soggy corn bread; and a half-filled pitcher of molasses. No coffee or milk; only warm water to drink. Paul Wesley passed up the *pièce de resistance*. Had it been hot and well cooked, he could scarcely have eaten it; cold, greasy and picked-over, it was impossible.

When they were ready to leave, Brother Polk inquired what were the charges for their dinner and the feed for the horses. That was his invariable custom, although he knew that few people, whether they were church folks or not, charged preachers for entertainment.

"Well, I dunno as I ought to make any charge, but——"

"Oh, yes," Brother Polk insisted. "We don't want to impose on folks."

"All right then, if you feel that way about it. I guess a dollar'd be about right, but I really don't——"

"That's perfectly satisfactory and reasonable enough," Brother Polk said, closing the transaction.

As they drove off his father turned to Paul Wesley and jokingly asked, "Well, how did you enjoy the dinner? Wasn't that 'possum good, though?"

"Huh!" Paul Wesley grunted his disgust.

"Why, didn't you enjoy it?" Brother Polk came back in apparent surprise.

"Huh! 'possum! I wouldn't eat it if I never got anything to eat."

"Why, 'possum's fine—with sweet potatoes and gravy," the father continued his teasing. "Why, back in Tennessee——"

"Well, why didn't you eat it, then?" Paul Wesley countered.

"I did—some of it."

"Yes, some of it—but not like you ate chicken last night at Brother Hart's."

Brother Polk laughed heartily, admitting that Paul Wesley had the better of the argument. His appreciation of Sister Hart's fried chicken had indeed been notable.

Toward the close of the afternoon they began looking out for a stopping place for the night. "We'd better try the next place we come to," Brother Polk observed. "We may have a hard time finding a good place to-night."

At the first place, they were informed that there was no room for them. "Sorry to turn you off, parson, but

we've got comp'ny and we haven't got room for any more."

Five miles farther on, it was sick folks that made it impossible for them to be accommodated. "How about chances farther down the road?" Brother Polk inquired. "It's getting late, and we must find a place soon."

"Well, there's old man Smith's place—just about four miles from here. Maybe you could stop there—they's just him and his old woman and the two boys."

With a word of thanks for the information, they started off. Then, checking the team, Brother Polk called back, "By the way, are the Smiths church folks?"

"Yes, siree!" was the answer. "Regular amen corner kind. Old man Smith is——"

"What are they—Methodists, Baptists——?"

"Meth'dists—regular shoutin'——"

"Fine! That's fine," Brother Polk commented. "Well, good-bye," he said as he drove off.

It was after sundown when they reached the Smith place, a small four-room, boxed and stripped house, standing about seventy-five yards from the road, in a small wire-fenced yard. Driving up to the wire gate that led from the lane into the pasture surrounding the house and yard, Brother Polk told Paul Wesley to get out and open the gate.

"But what's the use of driving in before we find out whether they can keep us," Paul Wesley objected. "I can run up there and inquire."

"No, get out and open the gate; we are going to stop here," his father insisted.

Without waiting for Paul Wesley to close the gate, Brother Polk drove up in front of the house and called out his customary summons, "Hello, there!"

Two strapping, half-grown boys made their appearance. "Howdy, boys," Brother Polk greeted them. And then, as he got out of the buggy he advanced to shake hands with them, and added, "How are you? I don't believe you remember me."

The boys confessed that they couldn't just place the visitor, although they were quite sure they remembered him.

"You boys unhitch and put up the team," Brother Polk said, as Paul Wesley came up, "and I'll go in and see how Brother and Sister Smith are getting along."

While they were putting up the team for the night, Paul Wesley saw that the Smith boys were somewhat chagrined by their inability to recall their former acquaintance with Brother Polk. "Why, you never saw him before in your life," Paul Wesley explained. "They told us back up the road that we might get to stay all night here, and he was just making out like he knew you."

The boys took it as a good joke on themselves. "He shore had me guessin'," Sam, the older of the two, admitted.

"He must be a purty jolly sort of feller for a preacher," Alf, the younger brother observed.

Meantime Brother Polk had received a cordial welcome from Brother and Sister Smith. When Paul Wesley came in, he found his father and the host comfortably seated on either side of the fireplace, swapping Tennessee yarns, while the hostess was busily engaged in the kitchen preparing a hot supper for the visitors.

II

At Brownwood, they were assigned to the home of Judge Mabry. The judge, a distinguished elder in the Presbyterian Church, had generously extended the hospitality of his home to the guests of the city. Paul Wesley was delighted with their assignment. Never before had he been an inmate of such a home. And, comparing it with what he had known in the straggling, almost frontier, communities in which he had always lived, he was no little awed by its apparent magnificence. It was no larger than Colonel Keener's big square, stiff house at Elliston, but it was different. Paul Wesley would have found it difficult to define the difference, but nevertheless he felt it. With its air of quiet elegance and unostentatious hospitality, Judge Mabry's home was as much unlike that of Colonel Keener as the genial, accomplished jurist was unlike the churlish and over-bearing Colonel Keener.

But, to Paul Wesley, the most wonderful thing about it all was Marjorie, the youngest daughter of the family, a vivacious high school sophomore. Against the background of her home and city life, Marjorie

appeared different from any of the girls he had ever known. Here, too, it would have been difficult for him to put into definite form the difference that he felt. It was not that Marjorie was prettier than the others. He wasn't sure that she was quite as pretty as the blue-eyed, curly-headed Helen Thomas whom he had once so madly adored. Not that Marjorie wasn't pretty! Marjorie *was* pretty. But—and this was the real difference—her being pretty or not being pretty, just as you chose, didn't seem to matter so much. For Marjorie had an air about her that was much more than mere prettiness. You knew, without being told, that Marjorie didn't stand at the foot of her classes. No; the tilt of her head and the bright flashing light in her eyes told you, more plainly than mere words could have done, that she was the daughter of Judge Mabry and that she didn't propose to take second place in anything.

At first Paul Wesley was somewhat abashed in the presence of Marjorie Mabry. The daughter of Judge Mabry seemed rather remote from the world of Morton and Elliston. But that feeling was soon dispelled. There was nothing in Marjorie's attitude toward her father's guests to sustain it; then, too, Judge Mabry was partly responsible for the change in his feelings. "My court is in session this week, so I shall not be able to show you gentlemen around," he told his guests—there were four besides Paul Wesley—at the big breakfast table on Monday morning, "but Marjorie will look after you. She is staying out of school this week for

that purpose, and will be glad to drive you to the church or anywhere else you may care to go." Then, with a twinkle in his eyes, he added, "And as to the young man, I presume Marjorie can find some means of entertaining him, unless he cares to spend all of his time at the conference. But you had better watch out," he warned Paul Wesley, "or there's no telling what scrape she may get you into before the week is out."

"Now, Dad!" Marjorie protested.

"You know, gentlemen," the judge, with a chuckle, went on, ignoring Marjorie's protest, "I often say she's my favorite boy——"

"Mother! Can't you do something to stop him—before he disgraces the family?" Marjorie laughingly appealed.

"Harvey, I think you have said enough," Mrs. Mabry responded. Then to her guests she explained, "That's one of the judge's favorite jokes. We haven't any boys—all of our children are girls—and just to tease her, he sometimes pretends that Marjorie is a boy."

The remainder of the week passed all too soon. For hours and hours, both morning and afternoon, Paul Wesley and Marjorie were together, driving around in her little pony cart, enjoying their holidays. After that morning at the breakfast table he had felt no awe of Marjorie Mabry, and Marjorie had made it easy for him to accept her hospitality. In fact, she made it appear that he was doing her a favor, by providing her

with an excuse for remaining away from school. "Now you mustn't desert me," she told him, when he had diffidently declined an invitation to drive. "The preachers are so busy, they haven't time to let me do anything for them. So, if you won't let me drive you around, I'll just have to go back to school. But," she added archly, "if you prefer to attend the conference or to go by yourself——"

No, indeed, he hadn't meant that, Paul Wesley had protested. He liked to drive. In fact, he couldn't imagine anything he'd rather do, but he didn't want to put her out—to be too much trouble to them.

On the way back to Morton, where, the bishop had decreed, his father was to spend another year, Paul Wesley's thoughts went back over the incidents of that week. It had been a wonderful time. He had enjoyed it far beyond his most sanguine expectations. It was all on account of Marjorie! But for her, he thought, he would have had a very dull time at Brownwood. In fact, he couldn't imagine himself having a good time at Brownwood without Marjorie.

Step by step, he went back over those drives they had had. It had been great fun, they had both thought, to be free to run around and do just as they pleased, while all the other boys and girls were shut up in school. But more often perhaps than to anything else his thoughts returned to the times when they had driven by the Brownwood College, a small institution maintained by the Presbyterian denomination. The college, with its

two, large, red-brick buildings, its tennis courts, and its athletic field, was the most interesting sight that Marjorie had had to show him. He had never tired of seeing it. Never before having seen a college, he invested Brownwood College with all of the glamour that in his day dreams he had associated with college life. And it was then that he had been most closely drawn to Marjorie, when they had found that they had most in common. For it was there that Marjorie would go to school after her graduation from high school. "I've had my heart set, ever so long, on going to the State University, but Dad won't hear of it," she had told him. "He says I must finish at Brownwood first, and then I can spend a year or two at State; but," she added, "I think I can beg him into letting me go there for my senior, or maybe my junior year."

And then he had told Marjorie of his own plans and ambitions. He, too, had his heart set on going to the State University, to study law. "But papa doesn't want me to do that—he wants me to go to Vanderbilt to be a preacher," he had confided to her. And Marjorie had been very sympathetic. Their fathers ought not to try to tell them what they must or must not do. "I think that is something you've got to decide yourself, don't you?" she had sympathetically replied.

And now, recalling all of that and treasuring up in his memory Marjorie's sympathetic response, it seemed very wonderful indeed, especially when he recalled how they had counted the time before they could go

to the University and had planned the many interesting things they would do there, together.

But there, at that point in his thoughts, misgivings and doubts assailed him. It was a long, long way from Morton to Brownwood; much farther even from his little parsonage home to Judge Harvey Mabry's Brownwood home. Marjorie had been kind and gracious and sympathetic, but that was only what you would expect Marjorie to be under the circumstances. No, she had simply been kind and gracious to her father's guests, and that was all there had been to it. He mustn't let himself think it had meant anything more significant. Marjorie had been nice to him, and had shown him a wonderful time, but she had doubtless gone on back to school and to her friends and would soon forget him and the things that had meant so much to him. That was what his judgment would have him believe, but somehow he couldn't quite believe it, not unreservedly. For it didn't quite square with what she had said when she told him good-bye. He had driven around to the front gate, and while he had waited there for his father, Marjorie had come out and stood beside the buggy, talking to him. And just before his father had come within hearing she had said, "Well, good-bye till we meet at the University." And then she had added, "And you mustn't forget what we've planned to do when we get there."

It wasn't, he thought now, so much what she said—that could mean little or much; but it was the way she

had looked at him. Marjorie had looked then as if she meant him to understand—and not to forget. As if, he reflected, he needed to be reminded not to forget that!

CHAPTER 17

SORROW

I

WITH his father Paul Wesley had often come in close touch with the stark realities of life, but that contact was more official than personal, merely an incident of his father's pastorate. It was the pastor's duty to minister to the sick and the afflicted, to visit the widow and the orphan, to close the eyes of the dead and to officiate at their interment; and the son, observing the performance of those duties, beheld the objects of his father's ministrations from the professional rather than the personal viewpoint. It was his father's professional skill in the administration of his office, not the hapless individual who chanced to be a claimant on his priestly care, that commanded the boy's interest. In this respect, his attitude was not unlike that of the son of a physician, who observing his father's work, would be more interested in his success or failure than in the welfare of the patient in need of the physician's care or the surgeon's knife.

Thus Paul Wesley's view of death was colored by his relation to his minister-father. He had seen people die. More than once had he stood with his father at the bedside of the dying. He saw little children taken from this world of sorrow and care to become bright

and shining angels in Heaven. He saw "fathers and mothers in Israel, relieved of the burdens and cares of life, entering upon the joys of the life everlasting."

The death of his little sister, Mary, scarcely four years of age, gave him the first insight into the true meaning of death. The fatal illness was of short duration; the end came suddenly, late at night. Paul Wesley and his father were alone at the bedside; the mother, exhausted, had fallen asleep in the next room. A violent convulsion seized the child, distorting and torturing the little body. In that tense moment there was nothing that the anxious father and brother could do.

The convulsion passed, the little limbs relaxed, and the congested blood ebbed from the distorted features. The eyes opened with a quick upward glance. A bright smile lighted up the child's face and then, in an instant, it was gone. With that smile went the immortal spirit of Paul Wesley's baby sister.

Father and son stood there silently, looking down upon the still figure on the bed. That beautiful, fleeting smile—what did it betoken? Had the little child caught a glimpse of the Heavenly Beyond in that final moment of her earthly life? Had there been beautiful ministering angels hovering just above her, waiting to wing her spirit away to its eternal home?

The father was the first to speak. "She's gone; your little sister, Mary, has left us. God has taken her

away—to live with Him and the angels,” he said gently, reverently. Then in a choking voice he continued, “She’s not suffering now; that is all over. Where she is now, there is no pain or sorrow—only joy and peace.”

It was then that Paul Wesley grasped for the first time the real meaning of death and its personal significance. When he saw his father place his hand over the staring eyes, gently closing their lids, and then draw the bed covering up over the still form of his beloved little sister, he realized that she had left him, never to return.

But the memory of that beautiful smile lingered. Even in that sad hour of separation and loss, it robbed death of much of its cruel sting. In that smile—so much like the joyous smile of recognition when the face of a loved one is seen for the first time after a long separation—was the promise of something beyond the pain and sadness of that midnight hour.

II

The death of their child created a sad problem for the parents of Paul Wesley. To them Morton was not home. In a few months at most they would leave to take up their work in another place, perhaps in a distant section of the state. Where, then, should the final resting place be? Where should those dear remains be buried if they were ever to have an opportunity to visit the little grave?

The only alternative to interment at Morton was to carry the body to Parkerton, where Brother Polk's mother resided. There they owned a small amount of property, the remnants of Edith Bruce's inheritance. But that was not really home to them—it was little more than a point around which their itinerant lives revolved. To go to Parkerton meant, however, a long overland trip, for there was no direct railway connection from Morton, the nearest railway station being itself a long day's drive away. The overland trip would require at least two days and the intervening night; to go by rail would take no less time, and probably more.

Going to Parkerton for the interment was, it appeared, out of the question; so, the mother at last reluctantly consented to the burial of the child at Morton. And a grave in the local cemetery was prepared.

The hour for the funeral had been set at three o'clock in the afternoon, but long before that time arrived the mother found that she could never be reconciled to leaving her child alone in Morton when she should have to move away to another appointment. Their plans must be changed.

"I just can't do it," she sobbed. "I couldn't bear to go away and leave her here alone. Let's carry her to Parkerton and bury her where we can see her little grave again sometime. We can get there somehow; we must do it."

Should they attempt it? The family physician was

called in, and that question placed before him for decision. On his advice they would act.

"Yes, there is one way it can be done," he finally replied. "It isn't a pleasant thing to recommend, but it will enable you to make the trip. Pack the casket with salt, close it up securely—not to be opened again—and start at once."

In the middle of the afternoon of the day following the death of the child they left Morton. A two-horse hack, borrowed from Brother Boyd, led the way, bearing the casket. The sorrowing parents followed in the big double buggy which the pastor used in making the rounds of the circuit. Paul Wesley rode in the hack with the driver, Jim Watson, a young man in Brother Boyd's employ. All that afternoon and far into the night the two vehicles rolled and jolted onward. Their progress was necessarily slow, the way being through a sparsely settled country and over little traveled roads. At midnight they stopped and struck camp for a short rest. The horses, after being watered and fed, were securely hobbled and turned loose to graze. Then after a belated supper, which was eaten in an almost unbroken silence, three members of the party lay down on pallets beside the camp fire to sleep and rest. The father alone sat up keeping watch.

Paul Wesley was tired, worn out by the physical and emotional strain of the last twenty-four hours, but he could not sleep. Overhead the stars shone brightly,

night breezes fanned the blazing camp fire, and the midnight silence was unbroken except by the occasional cry of a night bird, the distant yelp of a coyote and the snapping of the dry grass trampled upon by the grazing horses. Beside his mother, listening to the unaccustomed sounds and watching the flickering gleams of the fire, Paul Wesley realized the crushing weight of that hour upon her. That she was not asleep he knew. Long quivering sighs and an occasional sob that could not be suppressed told him of her sad wakefulness, and he longed to comfort her in her sorrow and loneliness. But he must do nothing to disturb her; she must, if possible, sleep and refresh herself for the trying ordeal ahead. And then his thoughts turned to his father, sitting there silent and alone. Sympathy and affection welled up in his heart for that reserved, silent figure. He wanted to get up and share his vigil but he knew that his father, mindful of his need of rest and sleep, would not permit him to stay up.

At daybreak they were up; and after a hurried breakfast the trip was resumed. All that day they pressed forward with only occasional stops to feed and water the teams and to relieve the strain of the journey. It was nearly midnight when they arrived in Parkerton.

The pastor of the Methodist Church was hastily summoned, and after a brief service they went immediately to the cemetery. There in the dead of night, in the midst of a chilling rain, and by the light of flickering lanterns, Paul Wesley stood beside his heart-broken

mother, and saw the mortal remains of his little sister committed to the rain-soaked earth.

III

Three days later they reached home. Paul Wesley went at once with Jim Watson to return the borrowed team and hack. They found Brother Boyd, sitting in his accustomed position in the doorway of his store on an upturned drygoods box.

"Well, we're back," Jim announced, greeting his employer.

"So I see," Brother Boyd answered. And then as his glance settled critically on the tired team that he had lent to his pastor, "Them hosses look like shoe strings, too."

Paul Wesley was stunned, shocked. Brother Boyd's statement, especially the tone in which it was uttered, struck him like an unexpected blow in the face. He had not consciously expected or desired an expression of sympathy, but he had not expected this.

Indignation flamed up in his heart and hot blinding tears forced their way into his eyes. Not at himself alone had that cruel blow been aimed. How he longed to return that blow—with interest! But he must stifle his resentment and obediently express his father's thanks for the loan of Brother Boyd's team and hack. "Papa said tell you he was much obliged, Brother Boyd," he finally managed to say.

"All right; tell 'im he was welcome to 'em," the man

perfunctorily replied; and then, turning to his employee, "Jim, you'd better drive on up to the house and unhitch. And after you've fed 'em, I guess you'd better take 'em down to the pasture; they'll need to run out quite a spell, to pick up."

The incident was closed. So, Paul Wesley trudged off toward home, his heart bitter with the sting of that thoughtless remark. Another wedge had been driven between him and the church.

CHAPTER 18

PLAY BALL!

I

FROM Morton, at the close of the second year, Brother Polk was sent to Haskell; and there Paul Wesley's public school days came to an end. He was sent away to Parkerton College.

One afternoon, early in September, Brother Polk found on the table in the front room a letter from his mother, who resided at Parkerton. When he had finished reading the letter, he turned to his wife and said, "Mother wants Paul Wesley to come to live with her and go to Parkerton College. She hasn't been well lately, and she needs him to stay with her."

A long moment of silence followed. Father and mother were thoughtfully considering the grandmother's request. His thoughts were of the future. To grant his mother's plea meant changing his plans for the boy. Not only must he be sent away from home earlier than had been expected, but to another school. It had been his long cherished hope to send Paul Wesley to Vanderbilt University, Southern Methodism's greatest educational institution, the one which supplied the church with most of its college-trained ministers. But the mother's thoughts were of the past—of the years

that had passed since the coming of her boy, her first-born child—those years that now seemed so short.

“Well, what do you think of it?” the father at last asked.

“Oh, papa, I don’t know what to think of it. Do you think we ought to let him go? Isn’t he too young yet to go away and leave us——?”

“Yes, he is rather young, but—by the way, how old is he now?”

“Just sixteen—will be on his next birthday, the fifteenth of May.”

After a moment of thoughtful silence, the father spoke again. “But, after all,” he said, “a boy is no longer a child at sixteen. Many boys have had to assume heavy responsibilities at that age. Take my case——” Then he recalled some of the earlier incidents of his own life; the stern necessity for his taking upon his youthful shoulders the burdens and responsibilities of a widowed mother and her children.

They had, of course, realized that sometime their boy would have to go away to college, but that time had, until now, seemed a long way off. Now it had come upon them without any warning. They were reluctant to make a decision. But there was one consideration that reinforced the grandmother’s request: Paul Wesley wasn’t getting along well in school. For some time that had been giving them no little concern. The boy complained that the professor wouldn’t treat him fairly; and the teacher was finding Paul Wesley

a very troublesome pupil. On several occasions he had been guilty of serious infractions of school regulations. He had been severely punished, but his conduct had not been improved; on the contrary, it was growing worse. Perhaps, it would be best for him to go away, they thought. The change might do him good. So, at last, reluctantly, they decided that Paul Wesley should go to Parkerton; for one year at least.

Paul Wesley hailed their decision enthusiastically. He was eager to make the change at once. He had for some time, been looking forward to the time when, at college, he would be free from the restrictions of his parsonage home, restrictions under which he was already beginning to chafe. He thought that at Parkerton, living with his grandmother, he would be able to do some of the things he had always wanted to do, but had never been permitted to do at home.

II

Parkerton College was a small struggling institution supported by the Northwest Texas Conference as an expression of the interest of the Methodist Church in Christian education. Few Methodists of that day, either clerical or lay, were willing to risk the education of their sons and daughters with state or privately endowed schools—institutions which they often denounced as hot beds of immorality and infidelity. Nor could the church, they thought, look to those godless institutions for orthodox, consecrated preachers. Each

of the five Texas conferences maintained, therefore, at least one school within its territory and also contributed to the support of the larger connectional colleges and universities. But, as this ambitious program required more financial support than was ever available, none of the schools, with the possible exception of Vanderbilt, which was privately endowed, was adequately supported. The small conference schools were always financially hard-pressed and found it difficult to do the task assigned them. Their faculties were, however, composed of consecrated scholarly men who remained at their posts year after year on meager salaries and with little public recognition.

Parkerton College was a two-story building, with a limited amount of equipment, situated on a five-acre campus. On the roof, in a little chicken coop sort of observatory, was what had once been a rather valuable telescope, the gift of a liberal-minded patron who wished to foster the higher branches in the institution. But now, because some of its vital parts were lacking, the instrument was practically useless, except for advertising purposes. In each annual catalogue, a photograph of the observatory, with the long barrel of the telescope pointing heavenward, occupied a prominent place. Instruction in all college branches was offered at Parkerton, and the school was authorized to award degrees, both academic and theological. The enrollment did not, at the time Paul Wesley matriculated, exceed one hundred and fifty students.

III

Of one thing Paul Wesley thought he was certain when he left home: he was through with the church. At Parkerton, unhampered by the Methodist *Discipline*, and irrespective of the likes and dislikes or prejudices of church people, he proposed to live his own life.

So he had thought. But the church, as it happened, was not through with Paul Wesley. Even before he was aware of it the church had laid hold of him. Before the end of his first term at Parkerton he was secretary of the Sunday School and first vice-president of the Epworth League, bound to the church more closely than ever before.

He had enrolled in President Sandford's Sunday School class, a class of young men college students. The force of habit would have impelled him to attend Sunday School and church, even if the college had not required such attendance. One Sunday morning, in the absence of the secretary, President Sandford was called upon for the loan of one of his boys as acting secretary.

"All right, Brother Superintendent," President Sandford replied. Then after a moment's consideration, he continued, "There is Mr. Polk; he should make a good secretary—he is the son of one of our preachers."

On the following Sunday the secretary was again absent, and Paul Wesley acted as his substitute, as was the case on several succeeding Sundays. In the end

the superintendent offered the place to Paul Wesley. As he had to attend Sunday School anyway, Paul Wesley saw no reason why he should decline. Nor was he averse to the prominence the office gave him.

A few weeks later, an Epworth League was organized, and Paul Wesley was made first vice-president. No little flattered by this additional recognition, he accepted the honor conferred upon him by his fellow-leaguers. Of the duties of an Epworth League first vice-president he was then totally ignorant.

But he was soon enlightened. To his utter amazement and chagrin, he found that, by virtue of his office, he was in charge of the Devotional Department of the League and would have to conduct the Sunday afternoon devotional exercises! That, he thought, would be just like leading a prayer meeting! Why, he would have to read the Scripture Lesson—might even have to lead in prayer!

No, he wouldn't accept the office. But he had already accepted it! He had even thanked them for the honor conferred on him. It was too late to decline; but he could resign—make some excuse to get out of it.

The next day he called on the pastor, Brother Carter, and told him of his decision to resign from the League office.

"Why, Mr. Polk, I am sorry to hear that," Brother Carter said. "I was very much pleased with your election as first vice-president. In fact, I suggested it. I hope you haven't definitely decided to give up the

place. By the way, what is the trouble? Tell me about it—perhaps I can suggest a solution of your problem.”

Much to Paul Wesley’s surprise, Brother Carter received his explanation sympathetically. And before he realized how far he was going, he had revealed to the pastor the essential factors of his religious problems.

“I appreciate your situation,” Brother Carter assured him. “In some respects, your problem is different from that of other young men, but essentially it is the problem that confronts most college men—a matter of adjustment, which time usually solves. In the meantime, I think you should go ahead with the work you have assumed; for, in the first place, it will be helpful to you and, in the second place, I need you. One of the greatest difficulties we pastors have is finding capable people to fill the places of responsibility in the church——”

“But, Brother Carter——”

“Oh, never mind that right now,” the pastor said, interrupting Paul Wesley’s protest. “I know what you mean, and it is an important consideration. But how do you know that you are not qualified? I take it that you are not irreligious——”

“No, sir; it’s not that exactly—but I’ve never been converted and——”

“All right; that’s what I thought. But, let’s think about that a moment. Perhaps you’ve got the wrong conception of conversion. Perhaps you didn’t need to be converted in the way you have thought of it.”

Brother Carter's exposition of the subject of conversion interested Paul Wesley. It threw a new light on some of his most troublesome problems. And if it were true, he thought, that conversion was after all, nothing more than a mere matter of adjustment—of placing one's self in the proper attitude toward God—why, his problem was much more simple than he had thought. But somehow that word adjustment not only had an unorthodox ring, but it fell far short of expressing the fullness and completeness of that mysterious and agonizing religious experience that he had always known as conversion. It was—well, sort of sugar-coated. It wasn't the sort of scriptural medicine that his father prescribed. But, then, it was worth thinking about—certainly it didn't require so much giving up as the other kind did.

The next Sunday afternoon he led the Devotional Exercises.

IV

As a concession to what President Sandford termed the modern demand for practical training, Parkerton College maintained a Business Department. Scant recognition was accorded this department by the college authorities, who looked upon it as a rank outsider, an unimportant adjunct to the college, which must be tolerated, but not recognized as belonging to the scholastic elect. A mere handful of students, for whom a limited amount of space in the rear of the college study hall was

set aside, made up the enrollment in the Business Department.

Glancing listlessly around the study hall one morning, Paul Wesley discovered a new face in the Business Department. "Gosh! I wonder who she is," he thought, his listlessness replaced by the keenest interest. "She's a peach, whoever she is," he decided. And he wondered why he hadn't noticed her before.

Just then Bessie Dale Knight glanced up from her ledger and met his frankly interested gaze. A smile, friendly and inviting, flashed across the big room; then, in a flash, Paul Wesley saw the importance of a practical education. Why, he asked himself, should one waste his time on dead languages and the mouldy history of extinct nations and races when a knowledge of business administration was what one needed for success in life? Yes; there *was* a vacant seat at the table at which she was working!

"Are you sure that you have time for it?" the president inquired when Paul Wesley applied for permission to take up bookkeeping.

"Yes, sir; I've got the time. It won't interfere with my other work, and I think I ought to take up some practical work—I may have to get out and get a job before long."

Parkerton students were under strict social rules. On school nights they were not permitted to have engagements; nor were they permitted to indulge in prolonged, intimate tête-à-têtes in the halls, classrooms, or

on the campus during school hours. In the afternoon, after school was out, they were permitted, however, to play tennis together on the college courts. But even then they were under faculty supervision, at least one of the instructors remaining on the grounds until all the games were over. Paul Wesley and Bessie Dale had soon discovered that tennis playing afforded an opportunity for them to remain together longer in the afternoon than they could otherwise. But to make the most of it they needed another couple. A twosome was too apt to attract faculty notice, to say nothing of the added zest and intimacy of playing as partners. Fanny Wilkins, with whose mother Bessie Dale boarded, was conscripted, and finally Paul Wesley brought in Frank Bowman as the partner of the not altogether attractive Fanny.

Then late one afternoon they found themselves apparently free from the usual faculty oversight. For them to fail to take advantage of their unexpected freedom was not to be thought of. Something daring and venturesome ought to be done to signalize the occasion. A number of stunts were proposed, only to be rejected as not fully adequate. Then Bessie Dale suggested, "Let's go in the auditorium and dance!" Phew! that proposal was, indeed, daring enough. Too much so, Fannie Wilkins and Frank Bowman thought. "Not on your life," Frank protested; "I'm not just lookin' for a chance to get canned."

But Paul Wesley scoffed at their fears. They weren't

"good sports—'fraid to take a chance," he accused them. Dancing, a pleasure in which he had never been permitted to indulge at home, constituted a large part of the practical education he had lately acquired under Bessie Dale's proficient tutelage.

At last, over persuaded, Fannie Wilkins and Frank Bowman gave in. So, into the auditorium they all went.

Grading an accumulation of English themes, Professor Hughes had remained in his room later than usual that afternoon. When he opened the door and walked out into the hall on his way out of the building the strains of a waltz fell on his ears. He paused a moment, listening. And then he heard other sounds. Perhaps he had better investigate, the professor concluded. •

Quietly opening the auditorium door, Professor Hughes looked in. On the stage, dancing, were Paul Wesley and Bessie Dale; at the piano, with Frank on the seat beside her, was Fanny Wilkins.

"Ahem——"

So quiet had been Professor Hughes' entrance, and so engrossed were they in their own affairs, they were taken completely by surprise, caught in a flagrant violation of college rules. They had no doubt as to the consequences. The least they could expect was a severe reprimand in the chapel, in the presence of the entire school. Nor was it at all improbable that they would be expelled.

"Good evening. You seem to be having a pleasant little party," Professor Hughes said, with a reassuring

smile. "Sorry I interrupted; but I was passing through the hall and, hearing the piano, I thought I should look in. The *Blue Danube* was—ah, rather unexpected I should say this late in the afternoon."

Their consternation gave way to amazement. Was it possible, they wondered, that Professor Hughes wasn't shocked by their unprecedented breach of discipline? Or was he only teasing them, gloating over their discomfiture?

"It's beautiful, isn't it?—the *Blue Danube*," Professor Hughes went on, as if he had not noted their speechless surprise and wonder. "And just makes one want to dance on and on forever——"

Suddenly recalling his position and responsibility, Professor Hughes caught himself up short. These young people were guilty of a grave infraction of the rules of the institution. Doubtless it was his duty to report their misconduct to the president. But—— Professor Hughes was, if no longer young, not yet old. Nor had he, as he now realized, entirely forgotten the time when to waltz to the dreamy notes of the *Blue Danube*, with his arm encircling a lithe and slender waist, meant something far more important than college rules—incomparably more.

"But, my dear young friends," Professor Hughes said, assuming the proper professorial air of reproof, "surely you know the rules—that dancing is strictly forbidden. And here in the college auditorium—of all

places in the world! You must not think of doing it again. Indeed, you must not!"

"Well, what do you know about that?" Paul Wesley, in an awed voice, demanded, as the front door closed behind them. "Caught us right in the act—dancing in Parkerton College—and let us off."

"Yea; had us right where he wanted us, and wouldn't turn us in," Frank Bowman feelingly argued. "But Lord!" he continued, "I was scared stiff. Saw myself buyin' a ticket back home—facin' the old man!"

That must be the end of that foolishness, they agreed. They might have known they couldn't get away with it——" And what if it had been somebody else—old Winston or "Sleepy" Ward or old "Turkey Lee," that cranky old maid oratory teacher—instead of that good old brick, Professor Hughes! Where would they be now? They had been mighty lucky to get off, and they couldn't afford to go back on a good old scout like Professor Hughes.

V

Literary Society work was one of the chief interests of Parkerton students. Rivalry between the two organizations for young men, the *Demosthenic* and the *Phaino*, was intense. The annual inter-society debate was one of the most interesting features of Commencement. On such an occasion the members of the two organizations sat in the gallery of the auditorium, just

above and on either side of the stage, facing each other and each group striving to outdo the other with their yells and songs. The honor of representing his society as a Commencement debater was regarded as the greatest to be won by a Parkerton student. The names of the victors in the classic event were proudly recalled by their fellow-members years afterward.

Invited to membership by both of the societies, Paul Wesley chose the *Demosthenic*. The name of the society, suggesting the last word in oratorical eloquence, appealed to him and, besides, the *Demosthenic* had been for a number of years uniformly successful in the inter-society debates. As he confidently expected to become a Commencement debater and enroll his name among the forensic heroes of the college, this was an important consideration. His first assignment was an oration, to be delivered two weeks later. Anticipating the assignment, he had already selected a subject and begun the preparation of his oration. By the end of the first week, the speech was written; then it was necessary for him to memorize it and practice the delivery. A small creek, a short distance from his grandmother's residence, offered the most suitable place to practice declaiming. A rocky shelf up against the high bank of the creek, at a point where it made a sharp bend, formed an admirable platform. There, every afternoon, he went over and over the words of his oration, studying the effect of every expression and gesture.

It was his last time to practice. Tomorrow would

be the great day. "Mr. President, gentlemen of the *Demosthenic*, and visitors," he began, in the long-accepted Demosthenic form of salutation. "You may search the records of bygone ages; read the annals of civilization or delve into the mouldy dust and débris of long-buried and forgotten cities—— Ah, yes; you may search where you will, but nowhere, or at any time in the world's history, will you find the parallel of this, the outstanding and most transcendently significant movement of the Twentieth Century." Then, in resounding periods, the compass of the world's history was epitomized, the ills of mankind diagnosed, and the dawn of a new and brighter era prophesied. "Even now, at this good moment, my friends," the youthful orator declared, "the light of that new day doth appear." Then swinging himself around, with his right arm describing a graceful arc, outward and upward, and with his forefinger pointing to that "new sun" which might even then be seen rising above the horizon, "BEHOLD——"

The flamboyant peroration died on his lips. For there, on an over hanging bush, within a few inches of his prophetically upraised finger, one-half of its glistening body coiled about a branch, the other half upraised in angry protest, and with its forked tongue hissing at him, was a small green snake.

* * * * *

The secretary called the name of the orator of the day. Paul Wesley rose, went forward, and took his

place on the speaker's rostrum and announced his subject. Well prepared, he was able to get off to a good start in spite of his initial nervousness. As he proceeded, working upward in successive oratorical flights toward his prophetic peroration, older members of the society turned and looked significantly at each other, acknowledging the apparent ability of the new member.

The great moment had come—— “Even now, my friends, at this good moment——” A prophetic forefinger, borne aloft through a studied, graceful arc, was pointing toward the East. “BEHOLD—ah—er—I say BEHOLD——” No farther than that could he go, for at that moment he saw—not the effulgent glory of a new sun lifting himself above the horizon of the world—but the glittering eye and the lashing tongue of a little green snake!

After an ineffectual attempt to recover his poise, he sat down—in utter humiliation. He had failed where he had confidently expected to triumph magnificently.

VI

“And now Mr. Rhoades wishes to make an announcement, I understand,” President Sandford announced one morning at the close of the chapel period.

A burst of applause greeted the big, red-headed captain and pitcher of the Parkerton baseball team as he walked from the juniors' section to the platform and faced the assembled students.

“Well, fellers, I just want to say that it's time to begin

baseball practice," Captain Rhoades began, when the cheering had subsided. "And I want all of you to come out this afternoon, whether you've ever played on the team or not. We've got to win. We're goin' to win——"

Tumultuous applause drowned out the remainder of the captain's confident declaration of faith in Parkerton's ability to defeat her baseball rivals.

"I guess that's about all," the captain concluded, "except I want every man here who has ever played ball to come out. Some of the regulars didn't come back this year. You may be the very one we need to fill up one of the holes. So, come out this afternoon and help us make this year's team the best one old P. C.'s ever had."

It had come at last—the moment to which he had eagerly looked forward all the year, even years and years before he came to Parkerton. Time simply stood still all that day. It seemed to Paul Wesley that the school day would never end. He attended classes as usual, but he knew little of what went on in the classroom. He could think of nothing but the possibility of making the team.

"Mr. Polk, will you please read next?" the dignified, bespectacled Latin professor asked during the Virgil recitation.

No response from Mr. Polk. At that very moment, at a critical stage of a hotly contested game, with the catcher's big mitt on his left hand and the mask dangling from his right, "Wes" Polk was in earnest con-

versation with "Cap" Rhoades. Two men down—the winning run on second base—and a dangerous hitter up! Should they walk 'im and take a chance on the next man up, or——?

Over his spectacles the professor looked inquiringly at Mr. Polk.

Can't afford to let 'im get hold of one—hit means a run—walk 'im! "Wes" Polk was earnestly admonishing his big red-headed battery mate, with the entire college waiting breathlessly on that low voiced conference.

"Mr. Polk, will you please give attention to the recitation?" the professor insistently demanded. "This is the second time I have spoken to you. Please read."

If Paul Wesley was not the first man to appear on the field that afternoon, he was right on the heels of the first one. At once he reported to Captain Rhoades and announced his intention of trying for the position of catcher. He knew that Bill Cox, who had subbed on last year's team, expected to step into the vacant shoes of Shorty Edwards, last year's heavy hitting backstop, but he meant to appropriate those shoes for himself.

"Ever caught any?" Captain Rhoades replied, with a critical glance at the long-legged figure in a nondescript uniform assembled from odds and ends of the college supply of baseball equipment.

"Sure—that's where I've always played."

"Where'd you play?"

"Haskell and Morton and——"

"Never heard of 'em before," Captain Rhoades said sarcastically, interrupting Paul Wesley's enumeration of the various charges on which he had lived. "But if you think you can catch, grab a glove and go over yonder and let Stub shoot you a few. I'll be over directly and see what you can do."

Ah, dreams did come true after all! He had passed the first test, and presently Captain Rhoades himself was going to try him out. What greater privilege could anyone covet than that—to face that heroic figure, receiving his dazzling shoots and mystifying drops. But would he be able to hold him? The captain had lots of smoke and he put a lot of stuff on the ball. It took a real catcher to hold Captain Rhoades, they said. But he was going to hold him, no matter how much stuff he had, Paul Wesley resolved, while he and Bill Cox took turns receiving the offerings of Stub Wilson, relief pitcher.

And when, three weeks later, the umpire walked up in front of the grandstand and, cap in hand, announced, "Ladies and gentlemen: batt'ries today—for the visitors, Smith and Jones; for Parkerton, Rhoades and Polk"—then Paul Wesley knew that life had yielded up its sweetest joy. Crouching behind the plate, with that thrilling announcement ringing in his ears, eager to signal for one of Captain Rhoades' fast inshoots, catcher "Wes" Polk waited for the gruff command, "Play ball!"

CHAPTER 19

ALONE

I

BROTHER POLK came to Parkerton at Commencement to take Paul Wesley home for the vacation. During the boy's absence, the conference wheel had completed another revolution and had carried his family along to another charge, the Brazos City circuit. On the three-day overland trip father and son had much of interest to talk about. Paul Wesley was eager to hear all about the new charge. From what he had already learned of it, Brazos City appeared to be very different from Haskell and Morton and Elliston. All of those little towns were set down in the midst of a monotonous stretch of mesquite-covered prairie, with nothing to distinguish one from the others. But Brazos City was right on the bank of a river, the Clear Fork of the Brazos, where one could go fishing and swimming every day! Why, at those other places, one had had to go miles and miles to find a good fishing and swimming place. The vacation possibilities of Brazos City seemed marvelous indeed.

No less interesting to both of them was Paul Wesley's account of his college experiences. Always interested in any thing pertaining to college life, Brother Polk listened appreciatively when Paul Wesley, not even

omitting his first humiliating failure as a Demosthenic orator, recounted his exploits in the literary society or related stories of the classrooms and traditional jokes on the college professors. Of the brilliant record of the Parkerton baseball team under the leadership of his hero, Captain Rhoades, Paul Wesley said little. He wasn't sure that his father would approve of his athletic achievements. Nor did he think it wise to relate that dancing escapade in the college auditorium. That would be a good story to tell the boys and girls whom he would meet at Brazos City, but it wasn't one to tell Brother Polk.

There was one incident—— Recalling Brother Polk's extreme sensitiveness to unseemly remarks about sacred things, he hesitated at first to relate that story, but decided to risk it.

"A funny thing happened one Sunday night during the protracted meeting," he began, feeling his way. Then as his father appeared interested, he continued, "Most of the out-of-town girls stay at the dormitory, and when they go anywhere—to town or to church or to a concert at the college—they have to go in a group with the chaperon. You saw them at the church last Sunday and know how that is. Well, Mrs. Ledbetter is the chaperon. The girls don't like her at all, she's so strict—watches 'em just like a hawk. And the boys are afraid of her. If they try to talk to the girls when they are out with her, she reports them. But once in a while we gang-up and put it by her—while she's

watchin' somebody up at the front of the line, we slip a note to one of the girls at the back, and she passes it on to the one it's for. But you've got to be mighty quick about it or she'll catch you, and then the girls get into trouble——"

"To say nothing of what the boys may get into," his father commented.

"Yes, sirree; the boys catch it too," Paul Wesley assured him. "One of the boys wrote a poem about her—'*To Old Man-o'-War*'—and it was published in the *Mag*. It got him and the editor both in trouble—President Sandford gave 'em an awful rakin' over the coals for it.

"But about that Sunday night—— It was just after a hard shower of rain. She was marchin' down the street to the church with all the girls lined up two abreast ahead of her, and just as they were crossing a side street a buggy came up. The driver had to stop so suddenly, that the horse splashed mud all over Mrs. Ledbetter's dress—a white one, with white shoes and everything.

"She was in an awful fix—she couldn't leave the girls by themselves while she went back to change her dress; if she made them go back with her, they'd be late to church. So, she just had to go ahead, all splattered with mud and water.

"Well, they marched inside—and while Mrs. Ledbetter was standin' up in the aisle, in plain sight of

everybody, waitin' for the girls to be seated, the choir stood up and began singin'——

‘Are your garments spotless?
Are they white as snow,—
Washed in the blood of the Lamb?’

Then everybody laughed—— Even Brother Carter couldn't help smilin' up there in the pulpit——”

“And no wonder,” Brother Polk commented, smiling broadly, as he hummed, “Are your garments spotless?”

Paul Wesley's story reminded Brother Polk of one of his experiences. “It was when I was a young preacher, just starting out in the work,” he told Paul Wesley. “At old Dresden, one of my appointments, I usually stopped with Brother and Sister Boggs. He was a steward—chairman of the local board. A cousin of Sister Boggs—an old maid—lived with them. And often, in the evening, she volunteered to entertain me by playing on the organ and singing. Apparently she thought she was a fine singer, but she wasn't—had a high, squeaky voice that sounded as though she were singing through her nose. Her favorite selection was one of the hymns—you know how it goes,

‘Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flowers
Have all lost their sweetness to me.’

But that wasn't the way she sang it. This is the way she sang it,” Brother Polk said, and then, in a high

nasal tone, imitative of the squeaky voiced spinster, who had in the long ago sought to entertain and to charm the visiting young minister, he sang—

“Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flo-wurs
Have all lost their sweetness *but* me.”

II

It was late in the afternoon of the third day when he caught the first glimpse of Brazos City. On the east side of the Clear Fork, extending from a point opposite the town several miles up the river, was a strip of heavily wooded bottom land that cut off from the road a view of the town and river. Not until they reached the bridge, could they see the town. As they drove up on the bridge, Paul Wesley exclaimed with delight. His father's description had not prepared him for the sight that met his eyes.

Immediately in front of him, at a distance of less than one hundred yards, a small group of frame buildings clustered together on a narrow, crescent-shaped shelf, from the outer edge of which arose a steep hill or plateau, over the crest of which the late afternoon sun was just then disappearing. Below him, flowing crystal-clear in its deep, narrow channel was the river. To the right, one hundred yards up the stream, was a weather-beaten, old gristmill and a dam, above which a lake stretched away into the distance, only to lose itself around a bend in the river. As they drove across

the bridge, they could hear, above the sound of the water tumbling over the dam and rushing through the millrace, the rumble of the millstones. The town itself appeared small, much smaller than Paul Wesley had expected to find it. But his father explained that the residential section was up on the hill out of sight. From the west end of the bridge the road turned diagonally to the right for a distance of little more than a city block, forming the main street of the town, and then, swinging back to the left, it led up over the hill. From the point where the ascent began to the top of the hill, the distance was fully two hundred yards. So steep was the road, that farmers and freighters had often to stop on the way up to rest their teams, "scotching" the wheels of their wagons during such rests with stones from the roadside.

Reaching the top of the hill, they swung around to the right, off of the big road, passed the Methodist Church and came in sight of the parsonage. Then an eager boyish voice called out: "Yonder they are—papa and brother!"

"Hi, there!" the youngster shouted as he dashed through the front gate and out into the road to meet them.

"Hi, there, yourself!" Paul Wesley shouted back to his little brother.

And then, at the front gate, waving at him and calling out joyful greetings, he saw his mother and his sister Lucy. All the afternoon they and the little

brother had eagerly watched the road, waiting for this happy moment. And Paul Wesley was glad to see them. It had been a long time—much longer than he had realized until that moment—since he had last seen them. He was glad to be at home again—even in that little, weather-beaten, Brazos City parsonage.

One week from the day of Paul Wesley's arrival, the Old Settlers' Reunion was to open at a famous camping ground on the Clear Fork, twenty miles below Brazos City. Dating back some twenty years to its organization, the reunion had become an established institution of unusual interest to Olton County and the surrounding territory. The annual attendance ran into thousands. From the counties to the west came cowboys to put on thrilling roping and riding contests; there the politicians foregathered to meet the voting population and expound their political views; there the neighboring towns sent their brass bands and other civic organizations to advertise those ambitious young metropolises.

For the young people especially, one of the most interesting features of the annual occasion was the Reunion Championship baseball games. This year, or until just a few days before Paul Wesley got home, Brazos City had confidently hoped to win. The *Grays* had the year before gone through the series undefeated until the final extra-inning contest. With a much stronger team this summer, Brazos City was counting heavily on retrieving last year's loss when word came that the *Gray's* catcher and heaviest hitter, a young

ranchman, had been seriously injured and would not be able to participate in the Reunion games. The championship hopes of the *Grays* were blasted. Without the aid of the disabled catcher, the team had no chance to win.

From his little brother, Paul Wesley got the story of the catastrophe that had overwhelmed the *Grays*. "Day before yesterday, Bill Johnson's horse stepped in a dog-hole and fell on him and broke his leg," the youngster told him at the first opportunity. "Bill was the catcher and the best batter—and now we can't win," he added sorrowfully.

"Why don't they put somebody in his place and go on and play?" Paul Wesley asked suggestively.

"'Cause they haven't got anybody to put in his place—unless——"

"Well, what's the matter with me takin' his place? I'm a catcher, and I can hit, too——"

"Sure—that's just what I started to say. I told 'Mr. Sam' this mornin' that you was a good catcher and was comin' home today. Mr. Sam's the manager——"

"What'd he say when you told 'im that?" Paul Wesley inquired eagerly.

"Said that was fine and for you to come and see him just as soon as you got here."

Paul Wesley jumped up from his seat on the edge of the bed in the lean-to adjoining the combination dining room and kitchen, which the two boys were to occupy jointly during Paul Wesley's stay at home.

"Here, let me show you somethin'," he said, as he took from an old battered valise his Parkerton baseball uniform and proudly displayed the college monogram emblazoned on the shirt front. "Say, what do you think of that?"

"Geel! it's a swell suit," the younger brother replied enthusiastically. "It's better'n the *Grays*'. The business men had to chip in and buy their suits. All but Brother Smith—he wouldn't give nothin'. Said that if they wanted suits, let 'em buy 'em—that he didn't believe in playin' matched games nohow."

The first thing the next morning, Paul Wesley, piloted by the younger brother, went in search of Mr. Sam, to assure the manager that, for the want of a heavy hitting backstop, he need no longer despair of winning the coveted championship. Both boys were perfectly confident that Paul Wesley's timely arrival had saved the day for the crippled *Grays*.

Brazos City's hopes instantly revived, and soared. With that hole behind the plate filled by an experienced college player, the *Grays* were bound to win. And Paul Wesley fairly glowed in the warmth of the welcome the team gave him when he reported for practice. It was for him an auspicious introduction to a new charge—happier than he had ever before experienced, he thought, as he saw the supporters of the *Grays* turning out in force to watch the new player.

And the pride and joy of the little brother knew no bounds. "Didn't I tell you he could play ball?" he

demanded exultantly of his small companions, as he watched his big brother, in his beautiful college uniform, 'whip' the ball across the diamond, unerringly 'pegging the bases.' "How's that for a whip? Could Bill Johnson beat that?"

But the malevolent fate that had all but shattered the *Gray's* prospects of victory when it knocked out Bill Johnson was still on the job, and not without a strong ally. On the last afternoon before the departure of the team, Brother Polk came home from one of his outlying charges, where he had had to go immediately after his return from Parkerton. Immediately and decisively, he vetoed Paul Wesley's intention of going with the *Grays* to the reunion. "No, sir," he declared, "you cannot go. You know very well that I can't permit you to play in matched games——"

"But I played at Parkerton," Paul Wesley protested.

"That's true—but not with my approval. In fact, it was contrary to my wishes and convictions. But I did not forbid it, because, for one thing, your mother interceded in your behalf; and, then, the games were sponsored, so it appeared, by the college itself. But, even if there were no objections to your playing baseball, there are other features of the reunion that are highly objectionable. There is, I understand, a great deal of betting on the games and on the horse races."

"But, Papa——"

"No; there is no use of discussing it," his father declared. "I can't allow you to go. We have gone over

all of this before, many times; you know my attitude, and that of the church, toward baseball and all such exhibitions." Then he added, "But if that concession on my part—permitting you to play at college—is to be taken as a precedent for your participation in other objectionable affairs, I had better——"

"Oh, no sir; if that's the way you feel about it, of course, I won't go," Paul Wesley said, cutting short his father's threat to forbid his playing with the Parkerton team the next session. It was better, far better, he thought, to give up playing with the *Grays* than to run the risk of not being permitted to play on the college team.

Leaving the room in which the interview with his father had taken place, he went out into the backyard and sat down on the woodpile, on the back side, out of sight. He was bitterly disappointed. His one year of freedom and independence at college had caused him to assume that his father would not interpose an objection to his going to the reunion with the *Grays*. Then he recalled how Brazos City had acclaimed his timely appearance. And now, he reflected bitterly, he must tell the boys that he couldn't go with them—that his father wouldn't let him go! It would be a humiliating experience; but, after all, that was the way it had always been with him—the things that he had so much wanted to do, and that appeared to him so utterly harmless, he must not do. *No!* Always it was *No*. For

other boys, *Yes*; but for him, *No*—just because he was the preacher's boy!

Once more *they* had interposed a barrier between himself and the things that other boys were free to enjoy, things that were, as he saw it, neither sinful nor harmful. No; *they* would not approve, and, therefore, he must remain at home while the crippled *Grays* were going down to a defeat which his help might have averted.

Again resentment and rebellion flared up in his heart against his father's church. Damn. Yes, he *would* say it—Damn the church!—*Their* old Church! They had no right to keep him from playing baseball just because *they* didn't approve.

But that denunciatory damn was not for his father. Always, from his first experience of that forbidding "No," he had made a distinction between his father and the minister, the representative of the church and its *Discipline*. His father, he thought, would have said "Yes." The minister it was who always had said "No."

III

The annual, mid-summer, camp meeting at Crystal Springs was an occasion of superlative importance on the Brazos City circuit. Dating back almost to the arrival of the first settlers in Olton County, its history paralleled the county's organization and development.

In the early days, when the attendance had been limited to the dozen or more families living on the widely-scattered ranches in that part of the county and there was no one denomination numerically strong enough to hold a revival meeting alone, all of the church people, regardless of denominational affiliation, had joined forces and held a union meeting. Later, when the country had become more settled and the churches were stronger in membership, the custom of uniting in one big meeting survived. The Methodists, being the strongest of the denominations represented, were nominally in charge, and the pastor of the Brazos City circuit was expected to conduct the annual revival, with the assistance of preachers, either local or visiting, who were of other faiths.

Late Saturday afternoon the pastor and his family arrived on the camp grounds, having driven over from Brazos City in a covered wagon, borrowed for the occasion. Many of the campers were already on hand, some of them having been on the ground since early in the morning; others were arriving every few minutes, driving up to their respective camps and there unloading bedding and provisions, and setting up tables and stoves in preparation for a ten-days' stay. Brother Polk and the members of his family received a cordial greeting, and were then directed to the preacher's tent, which had already been prepared for their reception, and where they would have their sleeping quarters. The

pastor's family did not provide their own meals; they were expected to eat around with the campers.

For weeks everything in the neighborhood of the Springs had been planned for this occasion. Farm and ranch work had been so directed that everything would be in readiness. Ample supplies of provisions were laid in; generous quantities of bread baked, cakes and pies made. Fresh, green brush had been heaped upon the arbor, and on the ground beneath it many wagon-loads of fragrant, new wheat straw had been spread. Kerosene torches, newly cleaned and trimmed, had been placed on the posts supporting the arbor, and row upon row of pine boards placed in position for seats. Now everything was in readiness for the Sunday morning opening services.

The scene that greeted him was not new to Paul Wesley. The big camp, already pleasantly astir with life and anticipation, was a familiar sight. Often before, here and elsewhere on his father's works, he had seen all this, but he found it none the less interesting and was eager to explore the camp and investigate the possibilities for entertainment. He knew that from the surrounding farms and ranches, and from the little towns nearby, would come boys and girls as eager as he to participate in the pleasant social life of the great camp and that there would be many opportunities for horseback and buggy riding. Then, too, there was the creek. Fed by great, clear springs, the creek had many

deep, crystal-clear pools which made excellent swimming holes. And even though Paul Wesley, after a year in college, considered himself rather grown-up and rated horseback and buggy riding with pretty young girls more highly than he had done on former camp-meeting occasions, he did not disparage the pleasures offered by Crystal Springs creek.

Sunday morning every seat under the big arbor was filled; outside, in buggies and wagons drawn up close to the arbor, were many people who had not been able to secure seats inside. On pallets, spread out on the straw-covered ground between the rows of seats and in the shade of the trees outside, lay many babies and tiny children too young to sit up on the hard, backless seats throughout the long service, watched over and fanned by their eager, interested mothers.

Well back in the congregation—as far back as he thought it expedient for him to sit—was Paul Wesley, with a comely daughter of one of the neighboring ranches beside him. Dressed in his best city-bought clothes and pleasantly aware that he showed to advantage over the other young lads present, he sat stiffly erect on the hard backless seat, attentively fanning his companion; the handle of the young lady's open-and-shut fan held lightly between the thumb and first two fingers of his right hand, the little finger outspread and curved, and the fan moving gently to and fro.

The revival, once it got under full headway, reached a high mark of religious fervor, with scores of conver-

sions and reclamations. But Paul Wesley sat through it all—stirring evangelistic sermons, soul-moving songs, prayers and exhortations—calm and unmoved. In the midst of familiar revivalistic scenes of his childhood days, he had the feeling of being on the outside of it all, seeing and hearing, but detached, aloof, and untouched. One short year at Parkerton College had changed his viewpoint. Now he had different standards by which to judge what he saw and what he heard. He was rather inclined to minimize the significance of the evangelistic efforts of his father and his co-laborers. After all, he thought, weren't they making too much ado about this business of conversion?

He had a new and, for himself, a much more satisfactory and less exacting conception of conversion. Inoculated, as it were, by Brother Carter's adjustment serum, he was now immune to the religious contagion to which he found himself again exposed.

IV

It was Paul Wesley's last afternoon at home before his return to Parkerton. He had spent the most of the afternoon on the lake and in the village, bidding his friends good-bye. At home, he found his father sitting on the front porch, with his chair propped against a post, reading the *Nashville Christian Advocate*. Paul Wesley sat down on the edge of the porch.

"Well, tomorrow's the day," he said. "Of course I'll be glad to get back in school, but I hate to think of

leaving home again. I've had a good time this summer."

"I'm glad you have enjoyed the vacation," his father replied. "And I—all of us—are sorry that you must leave. But it is important for you to get back to school on time. It's a great privilege you have—to go to college. I didn't have that privilege. I——"

"I know," Paul Wesley interrupted. Often had he heard his father speak of how the one opportunity he had had to attend Vanderbilt University was immediately taken from him. "And I've often thought what a shame it was for you to be knocked out of that chance to go to college. It would have meant a lot to you, and maybe things would have been different——"

"Yes; no doubt, things would have been different," his father agreed, and in his eyes appeared a humorous gleam as he thought just *how* different some things might have been had he gone to Vanderbilt that year in which he met this boy's mother visiting relatives in the bounds of his first circuit. But he repressed his inclination to express the half-formed comment that the son's words had suggested. Reverting to his former attitude, he went on: "I have always felt that I might have accomplished a great deal more in my work if I had gone to college. But who can tell? The Lord knows best. Perhaps He knew that I could serve Him better where I have been placed than in a higher station."

"But I can't see it that way at all," Paul Wesley said. "I can't see why you weren't entitled to some of the

better places, just as much as other preachers. I know a lot of them that can't preach half as well as you can, and they always get good appointments. It doesn't look fair to me."

Paul Wesley felt strongly on the subject of appointments. He was inclined to ascribe his father's failure to receive lucrative and comfortable assignments to an unjust and prejudiced favoritism on the part of presiding elders. He did not share Brother Polk's belief that conference appointments were divinely inspired. He thought that conference politics played a large part in the assignment of Methodist preachers.

"Well, I must admit that I've sometimes been disappointed. I should have liked to get better appointments, especially on account of what it would have meant to your mother and to you children; but it was doubtless the Lord's will that we should serve Him in the harder places——"

"At any rate, we have," Paul Wesley declared. "Elliston and Morton and—Brazos City," he went on, as his memory called up pictures of the past and his eyes appraised Brazos City. "They're hard enough for anybody, I'd say."

"Yes, they are hard—among the poorer places in the conference," his father replied. "But someone must serve Brazos City, even if it is a hard circuit. You must remember that."

"I suppose so," Paul Wesley conceded, "but I can't see why we should have all the hard ones——"

He caught himself up sharply. This would be his last talk with his father for a long time, and he didn't want to spoil it by discussing unpleasant things. What he had already said sounded too much like criticism of his father. He regretted that; for, however much he might condemn the ecclesiastical system that controlled the lives of his family, he did not have it in his heart to criticize his father. Loyalty to his father absolved him of blame for the hardships and unpleasant experiences that had embittered much of his own parsonage life.

"Well, it will be a long time before I get to see you all again—almost a year, as I won't get to come home Christmas," he said, attempting to change the direction and tone of the conversation. "But I'll have a lot to do this session—a pretty stiff course—and I guess it won't seem so long."

"No, it shouldn't seem so very long if you keep busy. And you can't afford to waste your time. You realize, I'm sure, that it requires considerable sacrifice on the part of your mother and the other children for you to attend college."

"Yes, sir; I do," Paul Wesley replied. "I doubt if I should let you do it. I ought to get out and go to work——"

"No, I didn't mean that at all," his father protested. "Your mother and I have always planned for you to go to college—to Vanderbilt. And we still hope that you may go there—next year, perhaps," he added.

"But I don't see how I can go to Vanderbilt," Paul Wesley said. "You can't afford to send me. You have the other children to look out for. And besides——"

"There is a way—it is open to you," his father said significantly, looking fixedly at Paul Wesley.

"Yes, sir; I know," Paul Wesley replied, in a low tone, choosing his words deliberately, his own eyes meeting squarely those of his father. "But I can't go that way."

They had come to the issue toward which their talk had inevitably led, the issue that had always stood between them and held them apart. Pushed into the background of their association, avoided as if by mutual consent during recent months and years, that issue was now present, undisguised, clear cut, no longer to be evaded. That it must be settled now, once and for all, Paul Wesley realized; and he knew what his answer must be. He had no intention of going to Vanderbilt as a ministerial student. That he must now tell his father, but he wanted to make the blow as light as possible.

There was a moment of silence, thoughtful and questioning. The eyes of father and son met; those of the one challenging, then pleading, and finally growing misty; those of the other unyielding, denying, but hungering for sympathy and understanding.

The father was the first to speak. "You can't go that way?" he said.

Paul Wesley shook his head. It was difficult for him

to speak. "No, I can't go that way, papa," he said at last.

"You know what we—your mother and I—have always hoped—and prayed for?"

"Yes, I know what you mean," Paul Wesley replied softly, without looking at his father. "But I can't——"

"And that can mean but one thing—you have chosen another way."

The son's silence was affirmative.

"It is a serious thing to turn aside from the path into which one has been called—to refuse to do His will."

"But what if one hasn't been called?" Paul Wesley asked. "I'm not at all certain——"

"But you've thought so? You've felt ever since you were a child that the Lord had called you into His service, haven't you?"

Paul Wesley did not answer. He could not deny that from his earliest childhood he had felt that he had been called into the ministry. But he was reluctant to admit that now.

"Isn't that so?" his father insisted.

"Yes, sir; that is true," Paul Wesley admitted. "But I'm not sure. I don't *know* that I've been called; and, if I haven't, it would be a mistake for me to go that way, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," his father conceded. "But how can you account for your feeling that way, if the thought was not divinely inspired?"

He did not answer immediately. He was in a diffi-

cult situation. There was an answer—the true answer—to his father's question. But that one he did not wish to give. He wished to spare his father the pain of being told that he himself had inspired that feeling—that it was the father who had influenced the son to believe, or rather fear, that he had been called into the ministry.

While he was yet considering his answer, seeking a way to avoid wounding his father and at the same time to maintain his own position, his father spoke again. "And have you tried to find out what it meant? Have you asked Him for guidance? You can have the truth if you want it. We have His word for it: 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it shall be given him.'"

Again the son's only answer was silence. He had not sought guidance from that source in making his decision. Now, as in the past, he was unwilling to put the issue to that test. Ingrained too deeply in his being for the doubts and unbeliefs of recent years to overcome was a belief in the potency of prayer; that is, of prayer predicated on a wholehearted committal to the answer thereto. He did not actually *believe* in direct answer to prayer, a manifest revelation of the divine will in a specific case; but he could not escape the feeling—a heritage of his childhood—that prayer, if made in good faith, might bring an unwanted revelation of divine intent and purpose.

The father interpreted correctly the son's silence, and after a moment he went on. "You can't afford to make

a mistake. The issues are too important—too serious—to be lightly regarded. If the Lord has laid His hand on you, my son, and marked you for His service, you cannot—must not—refuse to do His bidding. You must go where He points the way. Otherwise, what is there to hope for, in this or the other world? ‘For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?’ ”

“But, papa, I can’t see that that necessarily follows. Why does one have to be lost just because he can’t serve God in one particular way? People can’t all be preachers. Some have got to do other things—be business men and doctors and lawyers. Can’t you be a Christian and be a lawyer?”

The father looked keenly at the boy a moment before replying.

“Yes, it is possible for you to be a lawyer and a Christian; but——”

He stopped a moment while he studied the effects of his last words as they were revealed in the son’s face.

“But,” he continued, “not a successful lawyer.”

“I can’t believe that,” Paul Wesley said earnestly. “You must be mistaken. Why, the world needs lawyers, just as it needs doctors and preachers and teachers, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it sometimes needs lawyers—the right sort of lawyers—men of integrity—lawyers who will not represent an unrighteous cause—the kind of a lawyer Robert E. Lee would have been and that John H. Reagan

was. Do you want to be that sort of a lawyer and—die poor?”

“Well, I don’t want always to be poor,” Paul Wesley answered. “I want to make money, of course; but I wouldn’t want to be the other sort of lawyer, one who isn’t honest and doesn’t always stand for the right.”

“But that is the choice you must make,” his father insisted. “To be successful in making money a lawyer has to do things that a Christian can’t do. That’s been my observation. No, son, there is nothing for you that way. Your course lies in another direction. Don’t mistake it. Don’t miss the real issue of life. Your mother and I, at your birth, dedicated you to the Lord. I confidently believe that He has called you for His work. And if he has,” he paused a moment, choosing his words, “and if he has, then the realization of no other ambition can compensate for the loss—the *eternal* loss—that will be the consequence of your failure to respond to His call.”

He stopped. What more could he say to call back this boy, his “preacher-boy,” from his resolution to go his own way, one that must lead him inevitably to failure and unhappiness? There was a silence between them. The eyes of the father, in which there was no longer the light of hope, were fixed on the son; and the eyes of the son were looking out over the weather-beaten roofs of Brazos City and beyond them, into the past, back to Elliston and Bentonville, and all the other drab, dust-covered, and weather-beaten little towns in

which he had lived on his father's circuits—so many of them that he could not now recall the order in which they came. Like mile posts were those little towns, marking the long, toilsome road his father had traveled, year after year—to Brazos City. What assurance had he but that he himself might have to follow that self-same road, or one not unlike it, if he did what his father wanted him to do? Was it for that he must renounce his ambition and turn his back on the alluring promises of his dreams?

With a quick, decisive movement, he raised his head, turned, faced his father, and gave his answer. Not in words—before the words could be formed, his eyes flashed their message: "No! I must go my own way!"

"And you are resolved to go that way—in spite of what I've told you—our hopes—our prayers—against His will?"

Paul Wesley, steeled for the final crisis, but moved as he had never been before, nodded affirmation. "I can't go the other way," he said, quietly but resolutely.

"Then I——" There was a pause. Then the father went on, speaking slowly, deliberately, in a tone vibrant with suppressed emotion, but with a note of finality that precluded any appeal, "Then you—must go—alone."

Paul Wesley understood. And he accepted the verdict. If he would go his own way, he could not expect help from his father.

"Yes, sir; I know that," he said. "It's all right; I'll go to work—I ought to anyway."

"No, not now. This year at college—it is yours—we've planned for you to have it. But then—next year—the other children—they must have their chance. Perhaps one of them——"

Paul Wesley got up. There was nothing more to say. The issue was settled. "Well, I guess I'd better go pack up," he said.

"Yes, you'd better get ready now. You'll hardly have time in the morning. The stage coach leaves early."

At the door, he turned and looked at his father. He wanted to say something—anything—to soften his father's bitter disappointment, to make him *understand*. But a paralyzing constraint held him in its grip, making it impossible for him to utter what was in his heart. So for a brief moment he stood there, looking into his father's face, with no word spoken. Then he turned away, passed through the door and into the house. But as he went about the simple task of packing up his few belongings there rang in his ears those final words of his father's, "Then you must go alone"; and turn wherever he would, he could not escape those pleading, misty eyes that had searched the very depths of his heart for an answer that could not be.

Yes, he must go his own way—and alone, with those eyes following him to the end.

CHAPTER 20

REVOLT

ON his return to college, Paul Wesley found a new pastor in charge of Parkerton First Church. During the summer Brother Carter had been appointed presiding elder to fill a vacancy caused by the death of the prior incumbent, and this had resulted in the transfer of John R. Rowland from Nashville, where he had been the pastor of a small, but fashionable, city church, to Parkerton.

The Reverend John R. Rowland was now thirty-five years of age; a Vanderbilt man, with a brilliant college record. His transfer to Texas was dictated by the desire of the presiding bishop of the Northwest Texas Conference to bring to the Parkerton pastorate a man of acknowledged scholarship and of thorough acquaintance with college students and their problems. The appointment of the scholarly, polished, and eloquent Brother Rowland promised to inaugurate a new era in the religious and social life of the Parkerton church and college community. And so it did!

To Paul Wesley's way of thinking, Brother Rowland's sermons were masterpieces of eloquence and literary flavor. To the exposition of Biblical texts, the new pastor was able to bring a wealth of literary and historical material. Age-old Scriptural truths, hereto-

fore grim, stark and uncompromising, appeared in his sermons in a soft, soothing and restful light. Old truths they were indeed, but with a modern interpretation and application. Brother Rowland's deft literary and philosophical brush toned down the harsh lines of command and forbiddance and emphasized the softer, more acceptable, permissiveness of Christian living. For one who, like Paul Wesley, had found himself unable to accept the terms prescribed by other religious teachers, Brother Rowland's philosophy of religious life was a welcome substitute.

But Paul Wesley's estimate of the new Parkerton pastor was not accepted by all the membership. Already, within the space of two or three months at most, there were dissenters—those who were beginning to suspect the new pastor of having a too decided leaning toward Higher Criticism, the nineteen-hundred counterpart of today's modernistic interpretation of the Bible. Those nineteen-hundred brethren of today's Fundamentalists, who took the Book, as they found it, and had no desire to take it to pieces and critically examine the workmanship of its Creator; who accepted the Bible in full faith and confidence, unquestioningly, as a product of Divine inspiration and revelation; and who believed in it from "kiver to kiver," omitting nothing, and seeing no need for addition or amendment, sat in their accustomed places in the sanctuary, uneasy and apprehensive.

Nor was their uneasiness and apprehension un-

founded. The new pastor *was* a higher critic, and it was not long before he gave Parkerton full proof of that now only suspected fact.

The first flurry of the approaching storm that was to blow Parkerton Methodism from its quiet moorings broke upon the congregation on that Sunday morning when Brother Rowland announced his text from the Biblical story of Jonah and the Whale. The calm that proverbially precedes the storm settled over the closely packed church. The previously announced subject of the morning's discourse had filled the building to its capacity, and in the congregation were members of other denominations who had deserted their own services to hear the new Methodist interpretation of the old and long-accepted story of Jonah's miraculous journey to Nineveh.

The disciple of higher criticism would not, as he carefully explained to the congregation, assert that it was impossible for God to set aside the natural laws of the universe and thereby enable a man to live three days in the belly of a whale and come out of it whole, in perfect physical condition to conduct a revivalistic campaign against the enemies of his God; but, he insisted, it was highly improbable that God had found it necessary to do so in order to provide Jonah with transportation on that memorable sea voyage. Furthermore, what was more important, it was altogether unnecessary to give the beautiful allegorical story of the Lord's dealing with his rebellious servant that improbable and

fantastic interpretation. The story, written by the pen of a man who was wont to employ allegory in the telling of his stories, and who had to use the terms and symbols of his day and generation to express religious truths as they had been but partially revealed to him, contained scriptural truths of great value and beauty applicable to the modern day. The truths were there, literal, satisfying, and enduring from age to age; but the language in which they were clothed was, or certainly might be, only figurative.

The full intensity of the storm did not strike Parkerton, however, until a few weeks later. On that occasion, the pastor preached on prayer. In this sermon he gave his now divided and warring congregation an exposition of prayer as a mere form of religious devotion. Now, as on the former occasion, he was the exponent of a figurative reading of the Scriptural warrant for belief in a specific answer to personal supplications at a Throne of Divine Grace.

Prayer was a commendable form of religious devotion—more than that, it was enjoined upon Christians to pray—but it was simply that and no more, a form of devotional activity. It was the means by which one could place himself in the proper attitude toward God, thereby making it possible for God to work his will upon him, and through him upon the world.

God, the God of his Bible and of his religious philosophy, was a God of Law and Order. "By operation of His law was the world created, and in accordance with

His law planets revolve in their appointed orbits, and the order of the Universe is maintained," the preacher declared. "For the governance of the world," he continued, "God has set in motion certain physical forces, like the force of gravity, for example; and for the governance of the spiritual life of man he has likewise established spiritual laws and forces. To these laws of God, both physical and spiritual, we must adjust our lives. But we need not expect to set aside His laws or to modify their operation by prayer, any more than we might expect by that means to stay the operation of the force of gravity. Knowing the law by which God keeps this world in order, we must adjust ourselves to its operation, or suffer the consequences of our disobedience. Just suppose, for example, that a man should go yonder and climb up to the very top of that courthouse, and then willfully and in defiance of the law of gravitation jump off of it. Does anyone here think for one moment that the combined prayers of Christendom would save that man from the fatal consequences of his——?"

The hypothetical question was never finished. At that point in the pastor's revolutionary discourse, Brother Stock, an old, superannuated Methodist preacher, who had been sitting up near the front, rose from his seat, stood a moment facing his pastor as if he would voice a protest, and then without a word, turned around and walked down the full length of the aisle leading to the

front door—a startling figure of protest and indignation.

“Let us hope the brother is not well,” Brother Rowland declared shakily, getting up from the pulpit chair into which he had almost collapsed when the old superannuate started on his deliberate march to the door. “Surely no reasonable person would be so unjust as to judge a man’s discourse by only a portion of it.”

Then he made an unsuccessful attempt to catch up the broken thread of his discourse, but he could not recover from the shock of that unspoken, but none the less overpowering, protest against his iconoclastic removal of the ancient landmarks of the Church. Ashen of face, visibly shaken, and with a voice from which was now absent the clear ring of confidence, he brought the service to an abrupt end.

When, on that Sunday morning, the exponent of a figurative Bible pronounced the last word of the benediction and dismissed the congregation, he unloosed the swirling currents of a storm of theological discussion that, before it should blow itself out, was to sweep over the entire territory of the Northwest Texas Conference and blow the pastor of the Parkerton church from off the map of Texas Methodism, sending him hurtling across the Mississippi River into the receptive arms of another denomination.

In the storm of criticism, reproach, and protest that followed, and in the resultant trial of Brother Rowland

on a charge of heresy and incompetency, Paul Wesley's sympathy was with the deposed pastor. While he appreciated the fact that the preacher had been untactful and sadly lacking in judgment, Paul Wesley was loyal to the man whose preaching had been to him, whatever it might have been to others, helpful and inspiring at a time when he was cutting himself loose from the moorings of the past. Unable longer to accept the literal interpretation of much of the Bible on which a personal, religious faith must be founded, in Brother Rowland's liberal exposition of fundamental Biblical truths, Paul Wesley found firm ground on which he might stand. In the faith of his father's church, as he understood it, there was much that he could not now accept; much against which he even rebelled; but that faith, modified and clarified by Brother Rowland's scientific and philosophical interpretation, and stripped of its harsh commands and inhibitions, appeared in a new light, acceptable, not provocative of revolt.

But now that the church of his boyhood experience had arisen in vehement protest against this new, liberal faith, with both vigor and assurance disavowing it, and had expelled from its fellowship the exponent of that faith, Paul Wesley knew not which way to turn. He could not go back; to go forward appeared hopeless. He was adrift.

CHAPTER 21

WITHOUT MOORINGS

I

ONE afternoon early in March, Captain Rhoades hailed Paul Wesley as the latter was leaving the school grounds. "Wait a minute, Wes, I want to see you," he called out.

Paul Wesley sat down on the stile and waited. Presently the captain joined him there.

"I've just been having a talk with Prexy," Captain Rhoades told Paul Wesley as he sat down beside him. "Somebody's put him wise that some of the boys have been slipping off over to Germania Hall lately and he's investigating. Called me in to find out if any of the team's mixed up in it."

Barton County of which Parkerton was the county seat was dry, but the next county to the east was wet. Germania Hall, one of the wettest spots in that county, was just across the county-line, fifteen miles from Parkerton. Much of the Germania Hall patronage came from Parkerton, and occasionally Parkerton College students, recklessly taking their college lives in their hands, followed the example of the townfolk.

"Well, what about it?" Paul Wesley asked, assuming an air of personal indifference.

"Why, there's just this about it—he's got the names of some of the boys who've been over there, but he hasn't got all of them. He hasn't got yours—yet," the captain added significantly.

"Well?" Paul Wesley prompted.

"And," Captain Rhoades continued pointedly, "I don't want him to get it."

"Thanks!" Paul Wesley replied, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. The captain's attitude of reproof had nettled him just a little.

"Never mind the thanks," the captain flashed back. "It's not you and your troubles—and you'll have plenty of 'em, if he finds out you've been over there—that I'm thinking about. If you're fool enough to slip off over there with a bunch of boozers who might as well be canned now as any other time, for all the good they're doing themselves or anybody else, I wouldn't lose any sleep over it, except that I haven't time to break in another catcher this late in the day. That's what I wanted to tell you—and you'd better let it soak in, if you want to stay on the team."

The captain's frankness was impressive. Paul Wesley's attitude changed immediately from one of assumed indifference to that of frank concern. "You say he hasn't got my name yet?" he asked. "Are you sure?"

"No, I'm not positive that he hasn't, but I don't think so," Captain Rhoades told him. "But he's got Bill James and Tom Ralston—most of that Bates Ranch outfit."

At Parkerton most of the boys lived in one of several large private boarding houses. These houses were designated by the boys as ranches. There was, for example, the Walker Ranch, where Captain Rhoades and several members of the baseball team boarded. The Bates Ranch, a large two-story brick building, was where Bill James and Tom Ralston and from eight to ten other boys of their ilk—boys with considerably more than the average amount of spending money, but poor students and generally inclined to be troublesome to the college authorities—lived. Between the Walker and Bates Ranch boys there was little cordiality of feeling. Only in rare, exceptional cases were Bates Ranch boys scholastically eligible for membership in the Parkerton teams.

"But I haven't been over there with any of that bunch," Paul Wesley protested. "In fact, I haven't been over there more than two or three times altogether."

"That's two or three times too many," Captain Rhoades commented dryly, "especially if one of Bill James' bunch happened to see you or to hear that you were over there. Those snides'd squeal on you in a minute, if they thought it would help them any."

"That's so," Paul Wesley agreed as he tried to recall whether he had seen any of the Bates Ranch at Germania Hall on the few occasions he had been there or whether he had been so foolish as to say anything in their presence about his having been there. He recalled with a feeling of uneasiness and chagrin that he had

been inclined lately to boast of his flouting of college rules.

"But the point is," Captain Rhoades insisted, "you've got to stay away from there. You can't afford to take another chance, even if you get by this time, which isn't at all certain." Then after he had Paul Wesley's assurance that he need have no further uneasiness on that point, Captain Rhoades went on. "There's another thing, while we're on the subject. It seems, from what I heard Tom Ralston spillin' the other day, that you've been running around with Nell Easley——"

"But I can't see that that——"

"Is any of my business, eh?"

"Well, it does look like you're takin' a big dish in my personal affairs," Paul Wesley, somewhat nettled, replied. "But that's not what I started to say. What I started to say is, that I don't see what my running around, as you call it, with Nell Easley or any other girl, has got to do with the team."

"Well, it's got a lot to do with it—just about as much as your running over to Germania Hall has," Captain Rhoades told him. "Now, look here, Wes, you needn't pretend that you don't know what Nell Easley is, or at least what everybody here thinks she is, which amounts to the same thing as far as you are concerned. I guess you heard what happened to Walt Elkins year before last. But if you haven't, I'll tell you. He had to go home just about this time of the year—when we were countin' on him to hold down third base. His eyes went

back on him—so he said. And you haven't seen Nell on the campus since you've been here, have you?" He waited, but Paul Wesley said nothing. "No," the captain said, answering his own question, "Nell's college career came to an end with Walt's." He paused again, but Paul Wesley remained silent. Then with a conciliatory smile, he continued, "The point is, Wes, I don't want you to get anything the matter with your eyes—not at this stage of the game."

"All right, Cap," Paul Wesley, mollified by the captain's frank friendliness, assented with a gesture of salute. "I'll take good care of 'em from now on. You needn't lose any more sleep over that." . . . Then, "Anything else? Any more sinful pleasures I've got to give up?"

Captain Rhoades received that sally good humoredly. "It does sound sorter like preachin', doesn't it?" he acknowledged. Then, shifting his position on the stile and laying his hand on Paul Wesley's knee, he said, "Listen, Wes, I know I haven't any call to be moralizin'—I don't claim to be any saint myself—but I would like to know what the devil's been the matter with you this year. Why, last year you were just about as good as they made 'em—secretary of the Sunday School and leader of the Epworth League."

"Oh, that!" Paul Wesley scoffed. "I'm through with all of that—nothin' to it."

"Well, I'm not going to quarrel with you on that score," replied Captain Rhoades. "That sort of thing

don't appeal to me either. But you wouldn't expect to see a feller that was as strong for it as you were last year cut loose and go all the gaits like you've been doin' this year, would you?"

"No, I suppose not," Paul Wesley conceded. "Oh, I'll admit I've been actin' a fool—doin' things I've never done before," he confessed. "But," he went on, after a moment's pause, answering Captain Rhoades' question, "it's been difficult this year. . . . It's a long story," he said thoughtfully, "goes back to last summer, when I was home for the vacation—even farther than that. . . . You probably wouldn't want to hear it."

"Sure I would," Captain Rhoades assured him. "Go ahead and spill it if you want to."

Thus encouraged, Paul Wesley began his story. He was glad of an opportunity to tell it to a sympathetic listener. First, he told Captain Rhoades how disappointed he had been when his father refused him permission to play with the Brazos City *Grays*. And that experience, he explained, was just one of many bitter disappointments. Always it had been that way—the things that he had most wanted to do, he had not been permitted to do, because his father was a preacher. And that brought him up to the final, painful interview with his father, just before his return to Parkerton. It had seemed after that that he had really broken with everything that had gone before; that he was then foot-

loose, free to do just as he pleased. But he probably wouldn't have kicked clear over the traces and broken with the church and everything if they hadn't kicked Brother Rowland out.

"You know, I think that was a damned shame," Captain Rhoades said, interrupting Paul Wesley. "He was a fine fellow, a good sport, even if he was a preacher—took a lot of interest in the team—more'n any other preacher that's ever been here."

"You bet he was," Paul Wesley agreed. "He was a prince of a fellow. And," he added, "they say he was the best short stop Vanderbilt's ever had—a cracker-jack fielder and a peach of a hitter."

The expulsion of Brother Rowland had, as Paul Wesley went on to explain, been the last straw. After that he had had no more interest in the church and had just dropped out of everything. He had come to feel that it didn't make much difference what he did—that he might just as well cut loose and go to the devil, for all anybody cared!

"Well, I guess you have been sorter up against it, and I don't blame you for cuttin' loose," Captain Rhoades commented sympathetically. "But," he continued, "you'd better slow down, or else there'll be the devil to pay. You wouldn't find Prexy very sympathetic if he got you for trying to go to the devil in Parkerton College. You'd better lay off the Budweiser and fast skirts, if you want to stick around here."

Paul Wesley assured the captain that he meant to stick around until the close of the baseball season, at least.

II

As the close of the final term approached, Paul Wesley found himself facing a perplexing problem. This year was to be his last one at college, at his father's expense. He wanted to go to the State University the next year and enter the Law School. But without money, or any immediate prospect of obtaining it, he saw little hope of realizing his ambition. He had known, of course, all the year that after the close of this school term he would be on his own resources and that it would be necessary for him to obtain employment. But, drifting along with the tide of college life, he had given little serious thought to the matter. Something would turn up, he thought. He had a very indefinite idea of what that something would be; but, then, the necessity of deciding on that was a long way off. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," he had sententiously quoted and dismissed the matter from his mind. Now, however, it could no longer be so lightly regarded. The close of his second—and, so far as he could then see, his last—college year was at hand.

This year had not been a satisfactory one. Looking back over the events of the past nine months, Paul Wesley realized that he had made little progress in any direction; that he had, in fact, largely wasted his time.

About the only accomplishment that he could credit himself with was the establishment of himself as the battery mate of Captain Rhoades. But that accomplishment, desirable as it had appeared two years ago, seemed of little value now. In fact, so far as the future was concerned, it was of no practical value whatever, for neither he nor the captain would be back at Parkerton next year. He himself would be in no position to return, even should he desire to do so, and the captain was graduating this year—creditably, too, Paul Wesley reflected, surprised that the thought had not occurred to him before.

Then his thoughts turned toward Brazos City. It would be pleasant indeed, he thought, to go back to Brazos City to see his father, mother, Lucy, and his little brother and the baby, and to enjoy a vacation on the Clear Fork. But on second thought he decided that he could not do that. He must find employment; that was the important thing right now. He must have employment to support himself, to say nothing of earning the funds with which to go to Law School. And at Brazos City there would be no chance of his finding profitable employment. No, he must stay on at Parkerton and find a job. But the decision brought him no happiness. He wanted to go home. That little, weather-beaten parsonage home at Brazos City, so like the one he had gladly quitted just two years ago, appeared now to be a welcome haven.

It was in that state of mind—discouraged, depressed

and homesick—that Bill McGee found him one afternoon. Bill, who was intermittently a professional baseball player and an assistant in his father's transfer and livery business, was at that time organizing a semi-pro team to represent Parkerton during the summer in an association of eight mid-west Texas towns.

"What're you doin' this summer, Wes?" Bill inquired.

"Nothin', so far," Paul Wesley told him. "I've been looking around lately for a job, but nobody seems to need my very valuable services."

"Well, maybe I can help you out," Bill then suggested. "I guess you know that I'm gettin' up a team for the Mid-West Association."

Paul Wesley admitted, with little interest, that he had heard something of the project.

"Well, how'd you like to throw in with us? I've got Scotty and Jack Norton from the College team, and I'm goin' to try to get Cap Rhoades. If he comes in, I'd like to have you, since you've been workin' with him for the last two seasons. Maybe, I can use you anyway," he added.

Paul Wesley was interested, but he hesitated to accept Bill's offer. He would, of course, enjoy a summer of baseball—especially if he could be with Captain Rhoades. But professional baseball lay considerably outside the pale of respectability in the little world in which he had been brought up. And he knew what such a step would mean to his father and mother.

"I'll think about it," he temporized. "I haven't made up my mind yet as to just what I want to do. But I appreciate the offer just the same."

"All right, think it over," was Bill's answer. "But," he urged, "you'd better decide to come along. You ought to be able to make more money playin' ball this summer than you can any other way."

In the end, Paul Wesley accepted Bill's offer. Captain Rhoades and three other members of the college team had signed up with the *Tigers*; and, as he could see no other way out of his difficulties, he followed their example.

But he said nothing to his grandmother about his plans.

Then one afternoon, three weeks later, his father drove in—unexpectedly. Whether his grandmother, whose bright old eyes and keen ears missed little of what went on around her, had written Brother Polk to come, or whether he had simply come to see his mother, as he usually did once a year, Paul Wesley did not know.

Their meeting was embarrassing to both father and son. The recollection of that last afternoon together at Brazos City, when in response to the son's insistence that he must go his own way the father had replied that on that way he must go alone, made it difficult for them to meet and talk casually of things of mutual interest.

Not until the morning of Brother Polk's departure was the subject of Paul Wesley's plans mentioned.

Until then the subject had been avoided by father and son as if by mutual consent. This morning, right after breakfast, they had gone out to the lot to hitch up the team for Brother Polk's return trip. "Is it true, son, that you have become a professional ball player?" the father then asked.

Paul Wesley nodded affirmation. He did not think that his engagement to play with the *Tigers* for the summer made him a professional baseball player, but the distinction was hardly worth arguing, he thought. "Yes, sir," he said, "there wasn't anything else I could do—to earn the money to go to the University next year."

His father made no immediate reply. After all, he reflected as he stood with one foot on the buggy step and looked off into the distance—toward Brazos City, where once before he had sought to call back this boy from the wayward course to which he was committed—what should he say? If his son had taken such a step—one more disgraceful, more reprehensible, than he had ever thought possible—what could he say?

Then at last, looking searchingly into the eyes of the son, he said: "I want you to go to college—— Yes, even to the State University. But not that way—not at that price——"

"But it's only for this summer, papa. Just to earn the money to go next year——"

"The end in view, however desirable it may be, does not justify the means—— I had a thousand times

rather have you grow up in utter ignorance—with never another day at college—than to have you go that way—— But,” he continued after a brief pause, “but if you have so far forgotten everything that your mother and I have tried to teach you, and have abandoned the things that once meant something to you, then there is nothing more that I can say. You have decided to go your own way—a course that can lead to but one end——”

He stopped. There was indeed, as he had just said, nothing more to say.

A few minutes later he was gone—on the long, lonely drive back to Brazos City. Long after they had waved their last good-bye and his grandmother had turned back toward the house, Paul Wesley stood at the front gate, fighting to keep back the tears that would, in spite of all he could do, force their way into his eyes.

CHAPTER 22

COUNTRY SCHOOL

I

“**A**ND what then?”

In mid-summer, when he saw that his venture into semi-professional baseball was doomed to failure and that he would soon be without employment, with no hope of entering the University in the fall, Paul Wesley had first asked himself that question. Then he had been unable to answer it. Nor had the succeeding days and nights of anxious questioning brought the answer. And on that afternoon in Parkerton, late in August, when he met his friend and former college team-mate, Bonner Bridges, it was yet unanswered, growing more and more insistent with every day that passed.

“Hello, Wes; you’re the very man I’ve been looking for,” Bonner Bridges greeted him. “I’ve got a job for you.”

“Well, that’s good news,” Paul Wesley replied.

Then Mr. Bridges explained. “You know I couldn’t get back to college last year. I had to drop out and work——”

Yes, Paul Wesley knew about that. He knew that Bridges, who had played left field the year he himself entered Parkerton College, had been unable to return the next year, and he understood that he had taught a

country school away out on the edge of Barton County. But what did that have to do with the job, he wondered.

"Well, it's this way," Bridges told him. "I read law all last winter while I was teaching, and the county attorney has offered me a place in his office. It's a sort of clerkship—won't pay much—but will give me a chance to study and get some valuable experience. But—and here's where you come in—I've signed up to teach another term at White Rose, and the trustees won't release me unless I can find a good man to take my place. Of course, I could break the contract—they couldn't hold me to it—but I don't want to do that. It would hurt me in the county if I should ever run for office——"

"But," Paul Wesley objected, "I'm not a school teacher—and don't want to be. I want to go to the University and study law——"

"That's the point I was coming to," Bridges replied. "You can study law while you're making the money to go to school. And, besides, a year or two of teaching is mighty good experience for a lawyer. Why, did you ever stop to think how many big lawyers began that way?"

Paul Wesley was impressed. It was true, so it seemed, that most of the really big lawyers and statesmen had begun their careers as country school teachers. He recalled pictures that he had seen in magazines and books, showing poor, but ambitious and determined, young

men studying law (it must have been law) in the small hours of the night, by the light of blazing pine knots or tallow candles. What better could he do than to emulate their illustrious examples?

He saw, however, an obstacle in his way. He had no certificate authorizing him to teach in the public schools. But that difficulty his friend brushed aside, as of no consequence.

"That's all right," he assured Paul Wesley. "We can get the judge to fix you up. Of course, he'll have to give you an examination. But," he hastened to add when he noted Paul Wesley's reaction to the thought of an examination, "it won't amount to much. When he learns that you've attended Parkerton two years, he'll let you by easy—probably won't even bother to grade your papers."

And in the end, armed with the county judge's certification that he was "a person of educational attainment, worthy to instruct the youth," Paul Wesley was employed by the White Rose trustees at a salary of fifty dollars a month, for a term of six months.

II

The organization of the White Rose School under the direction of Professor Polk, who had neither theoretical training nor practical experience to guide him in the task, was a haphazard affair. Pupils were enrolled largely on an individual basis. The children, fifty or more, presented themselves with the books that

they had studied the preceding year, and expected to take up the work of the new term just where they had left off, whether at the end of the term or when they had quit school to go to work. In compliance with the demand of the trustees for the instruction of their children in the higher branches, classes in algebra, physics, and even Latin were organized. This meant, of course, that the most of the teacher's time and attention were given to a little handful of advanced pupils, to the utter neglect of forty or more children in the lower grades, but the White Rose patrons and trustees were pleased; their school was among the best in the county, offering all the higher branches.

In a happy-go-lucky sort of way the school ran through the term, to the satisfaction of all concerned. The pupils were pleased because the professor's demands upon them were not onerous and he participated freely and frankly in their games and social activities; the patrons accepted their children's valuation of the school; and the trustees were pleased with the conduct of the school because of its lack of serious disciplinary clashes. The young teacher was himself content, even happy. On the advice of his friend, Mr. Bridges, he had engaged board with Mr. and Mrs. Smith, an elderly couple who lived about a mile from the school-house, and whose children, now grown and married, had left them with a spare bedroom. The old couple had welcomed the young professor into their comfortable farm home and made him feel very welcome.

They cordially sympathized with his ambition to become a lawyer and make something of himself. In the evenings and on Saturdays and Sundays, when he did not go into Parkerton for the week-ends, Paul Wesley applied himself diligently to the study of Blackstone's *Commentaries*, and on the way to and from school he was ever the great advocate, expounding the principles of the old Common Law in defense of an oppressed client.

Engrossed in the more interesting study of law, Paul Wesley gave no serious thought to his school work. At home, he made little or no preparation for the twenty-odd recitations that he must conduct the next day. He trusted entirely to fortune or the inspiration of the moment to see him safely through any difficulties he might face. It was easy, he had discovered early, to bluff his way through a knotty problem by leaving it for his pupils to think over until tomorrow.

Once, however, in the beginning of his term, he had found himself in an embarrassingly tight place. In those days a rural teacher's ability to work arithmetic problems was the measure of his competency to teach school. Unless he could work the many, hoary, catch problems which had been handed down from generation to generation he was not accounted a first-rate teacher. And at any time, but especially in the beginning of his term, a country teacher might expect someone, with seeming innocence and lack of guile, to

ask him for assistance in working a little example. The entire community would know soon after how he came out of that test!

Nor did Paul Wesley escape. "Fessor, will you help me work this zample?" one of his pupils requested. Paul Wesley noted and commented on the fact that the problem was not in the book assigned to the boy. "I know it ain't," the boy acknowledged, "but pa gave it to me last night, and when I couldn't work it, he told me to bring it to you." With the attention of the whole school attracted by the pupil's request, Paul Wesley undertook to solve the problem. It did not appear to be difficult, but three trials brought the wrong answer. Then, to gain time and to cover up his embarrassment, Paul Wesley said, "Here, I haven't time to fool with it now, evidently I've made a slight error somewhere, you take my work and look it over, and if you don't find the error, I'll work it out for you tomorrow."

For more than an hour that afternoon, after school, he tried to solve the example. Then he realized that there was but one way out for him—he must get someone to work it for him. It would not do for him to confess tomorrow that he could not work the problem.

Five miles away, in the Gorman neighborhood, was Professor Banks, an old, experienced, country school teacher. Paul Wesley felt sure that Professor Banks, whom he had met at the County Institute, would work the problem for him and not give him away. So, he

saddled one of Mr. Smith's horses, rode over to the Gorman neighborhood, and called upon Professor Banks for assistance.

"So they've sprung that one on you, have they?" said Professor Banks. "It's one of the first of the kind the old-timers spring on a new teacher to try him out. They put one of the pupils up to asking him to work it; then, when he can't work it—and generally he can't, if he hasn't run across it before—they have a lot of fun at his expense. It's a trick problem, easy to work when you see the point of it, but it will stump most anybody when he isn't looking for a trick."

III

Once only did Paul Wesley face a serious problem of discipline. Fortune favored him, however, on that occasion, and he came off with flying colors, with increased prestige in the community. Charlie Bowers, a thirteen-year old pupil, was the rock on which more than one White Rose teacher's pedagogical bark had floundered. Charlie, an only child, was a notorious trouble-maker. His mother, a veritable Amazon, who at home despotically ruled the roost, domineering over her small, thoroughly-cowed husband and the hired hands, and who, whenever there was need of it, went into the field and, with plow or hoe, did a man's work, was the devoted slave of the youngster who had come, late in her married life, to bless her home. Never having herself opposed the willful desires of her cherished

son, Mrs. Bowers resented his teacher's efforts to control him. More than that, she had laid down the law to any teacher who dared to punish the troublesome Charlie, serving notice that "he'd better not do it again, if he knows what's good for 'im." And so, for the most part, Charlie had been permitted to pursue his trouble-making way unscathed, because his sorely harassed teachers knew they could not depend upon the support of the trustees in opposition to Mrs. Bowers. White Rose trustees were dubious of the wisdom of their siding with the teacher against the redoubtable Mrs. Bowers, for tradition had it that she had, on more than one occasion, successfully resorted to the use of a brawny arm and clenched fist to clear opposition from her pathway.

Exhibiting more zeal for discipline than discretion perhaps, Paul Wesley gave Charlie Bowers a liberal dose of peach tree tea, much to the surprise of that troublesome youngster and to the amazement of the room full of pupils who witnessed the chastisement of the outlaw. That night Mrs. Smith, giving Paul Wesley a friendly warning, said, "You'd better look out for Mrs. Bowers, for she's threatened to 'mop up the floor with the next teacher that dares to lay the weight of his little finger on Charlie.'"

"And she's plenty able to do it," Mr. Smith commented.

"Fact is, she broke up the school, a few years ago, by goin' over there and runnin' off the teacher," continued

Mr. Smith. "If he hadn't got out of her way in time, I 'spect she'd 've just about wiped up the floor with him that time."

Charlie Bowers' attitude, when he came back to school the next morning, was belligerent. "Ma's comin' over here and mop up the floor with yore coat tail," he told Paul Wesley.

"Is that so?" Paul Wesley replied sarcastically, although he was not without apprehension of the danger involved in Mrs. Bowers' threat.

"Yes, sir; that's so—she told me to tell you she was comin'."

"Well, why didn't she come along with you this morning? Why did she put it off?"

"'Cause she was too busy today, plantin' corn, but she's comin' all right—tomorrer, I 'spect."

"All right, young man, you've already had one good thrashing, and if I hear any more out of you today you'll get another one; and tonight, when you get home, I want you to tell your mother that when she gets here I shall meet her at the front door—with a baseball bat. Mind you, I want you to tell her that, just as I said it—and you can tell her, also, that I mean every word of it."

For some reason or other—the necessity for planting corn or superintending other farm activities, or what was less likely, the principal's bold challenge—Mrs. Bowers did not appear the next day, or at all. Young Mr. Bowers, for once in his scholastic life found himself compelled to walk the straight and narrow path-

way of good deportment. But Paul Wesley often wondered afterward what would have been the result had Mrs. Bowers attempted to make good her threat to use his coat tail for a schoolroom dust cloth. How could he have squared his bold defiance of the White Rose female terror with his conception of the proper method of dealing with a lady?

The school term came to a brilliant and highly successful end, with a big closing exhibition. At the conclusion of a long crowded program of dialogues, pantomimes, speeches, songs—solos, duets, trios, and even quartettes—and drills, in the preparation of which the pupils had spent a full month of the six-months' term, the White Rose community, with remarkable unanimity, declared that the school had been an unqualified success.

CHAPTER 23

POLITICS AND POKER CHIPS

I

THE White Rose trustees besought Professor Polk to take their school for another term. They even offered to increase his salary five dollars a month. But he had other plans—plans that he and Bonner R. Bridges, now assistant county attorney, had conceived and matured on Paul Wesley's week-end visits to Parkerton. Both of them were to be candidates for office in the Democratic primaries, then little more than one year off—Mr. Bridges, to succeed his chief in the county attorneyship; Paul Wesley, to succeed Judge Hall, Barton County's representative in the Lower House of the State Legislature.

It was Mr. Bridges who suggested Paul Wesley's candidacy and outlined the campaign. Judge Hall was now serving his third term, and the people could easily be persuaded to make a change, for they were, as a matter of political principle, opposed to long tenure of public office. The judge had not had an opponent in the last election, and probably was not expecting one next time. The thing for Paul Wesley to do, then, was, while teaching next winter—not at White Rose, but in a more populous and politically influential community—to visit around among the various school districts and

meet the people. They could, Mr. Bridges maintained, take some of their friends among the teachers of the county into their confidence and thus arrange to have Paul Wesley invited to speak in their communities. Thus, he would have, when the time came to announce his candidacy, the foundation laid for a successful campaign.

Mr. Bridges' suggestion fell on fertile soil. Paul Wesley had always, in his ambition to become a lawyer, associated the holding of public office with the successful practice of law. So, the idea of his election to the legislature appealed to him and, moreover, it had its practical aspects. In the first place, it would enable him to attend law school, for, at the most, the biennial legislative session would consume only three or four months of his two-year term, and he would be free for the remainder of the time to go to school. The compensation which he would receive as a member of the legislature would finance his education. And, too, a term in the legislature would give him an acquaintance that he could later capitalize, either in seeking a more lucrative county office or in the practice of law.

To record the events of the next year would be a needless repetition of the details of the astute Mr. Bridges' political strategy. As he had foreseen, the primary election eventuated in Barton County's overwhelming endorsement of the time-honored principle of rotation in public office and the defeat of Judge Hall who, because he either underestimated the strength of

his inexperienced, youthful opponent or was unwilling to belittle himself by making an aggressive campaign for re-election to an office in which he had exhibited distinguished ability, merely announced his willingness to serve the people again as he had done in the past, faithfully and efficiently, and let it go at that. The following fall, as a member-elect of the legislature that would assemble in January, Paul Wesley enrolled in the Law School of the University of Texas.

That year was one of the most turbulent in the political history of Texas. The issue that divided the people into hostile and warring factions was the demand of the advocates of state-wide prohibition for the submission by the forthcoming legislature of a dry amendment to the State Constitution. Northern and eastern Texas, with a majority of the state's voting population, were overwhelmingly dry, and were vigorously supporting the proposal to make the entire state dry as the Desert of Sahara. South Texas was predominantly anti, as was southwest Texas, where, especially in the counties along the Rio Grande border, a large Mexican population was controlled by strongly intrenched political machines. In west Texas sentiment was divided, with the advocates of local option outnumbering those who favored state-wide prohibition by legislative or constitutional enactment. The prohibition issue was the dominant one in the Democratic primaries. Candidates for office, from governor to constable, had stood or fallen accordingly as they espoused the one or the other

side of that burning issue. The gubernatorial contest was one of the hottest Texas had ever known. Out of the welter of bitter personalities and mud-slinging, the Honorable Barry Cochran, a life-long anti, but recently converted to the policy of local option, emerged with the nomination—a nomination which, the prohibitionists bitterly charged, was given to him by the machine-controlled votes of southern and southwestern Texas.

In Austin, the capital city, the situation was even more intense. There, day and night, political leaders met in caucus, counting noses and planning for the forthcoming legislative battle. Hotel lobbies were crowded with leading politicians of the two political factions and their lieutenants.

In the election of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the two factions faced the first test of strength. With the speakership went control of the organization of the House—the appointment of the Committee on State Affairs to which the proposed amendment must be first submitted. Realizing their inability to win this contest with a wet candidate, the opponents of the proposed dry amendment put forward Jack Thomasson, a dry local optionist from a west Texas county. Supporting him were the antis of all shades of belief. Judge Hawkins, an out-and-out dry of east Texas, was the choice of the state-wide prohibition forces. Thomasson's headquarters were in the *Crockett Hotel*, where, according to the political gossip of the time, more important legislation had been deter-

mined during the past twenty years than in the legislative committee rooms of the capitol. *The Avenue*, Austin's second best hotel, was the headquarters of Judge Hawkins and his supporters.

There were besides Paul Wesley, six student-legislators in the University. At almost any other time their presence in the capitol city would have passed unnoted, as of little consequence to any but themselves. But now, when the political lines were so closely drawn that a handful of votes might tip the scale in favor of the one or the other faction, the presence of that small group of inexperienced youths was an altogether different matter. Their seven votes were important—very important, indeed—to the political leaders and their campaign lieutenants. So, the University contingent found themselves solicitously and flatteringly courted. There were dinners at the *Crockett* and at the *Avenue* to which they were invited, and there was no end of caucuses and conferences into which they were called. With the exception of Tom Hilton, a senior law student, the University group were, like Paul Wesley, first-year students, with no legislative experience. Hilton had already served one term in the legislature, as the representative of a west Texas county. He was a local optionist and aligned with the Thomasson candidacy. From the first Paul Wesley eagerly followed Hilton's leadership. Hilton knew the political ropes, and Paul Wesley found in him a willing and efficient instructor. Together, the two spent most of their time

in the down-town political haunts, especially in the Thomasson headquarters, where Paul Wesley fairly basked in the flattering attentions showered upon him by suave politicians whose names were household words not only in the cities, but even in the rural districts of the state.

II

The long, bitter speakership contest came to an end with the election of Judge Hawkins, the dry candidate, by a very slender majority. But, narrow as their margin of victory was, it was hailed by the prohibitionists as indicative of the result of the ensuing battle over the submission of the amendment; a claim which the antis derided, pointing out that many local optionists who would not vote dry on that issue had voted for Judge Hawkins. The proponents of the measure would never, the antis asserted, be able to muster the two-thirds vote necessary for the submission of the amendment.

The issue was soon joined. One week to the day after the legislature convened, *House Joint Resolution Number One* had been introduced, reported on favorably by the Committee on State Affairs and placed on the calendar as a special order of business. A long day of acrimonious debate and parliamentary skirmishing followed, and when, late in the evening, the House recessed, only the closing arguments of the leaders of the opposing sides stood between it and a final vote.

That night was one of feverish political activity. The

leaders of both organizations were putting forth every possible effort to hold their closely drawn lines and to win recruits. Hotel lobbies and street corners buzzed with excitement and speculation. In the *Avenue Hotel*, grim-faced, determined men—men who were resolved to free Texas from the degrading yoke of the breweries—sat in council until the early morning hours. Nor were their opponents, two blocks away, in the *Crockett*, less active or less determined to win. There, in the seclusion of a room on the second floor, Colonel Julius Blake, chief lobbyist and legislative agent of the brewery interests of the state, plotted and planned for the impending struggle. An astute, resourceful politician, skilled in all the tricks of the political game, Julius Blake was the outstanding leader of the anti-machine that had for years dominated the political affairs of the state. It was his skilled hand that manipulated the wires controlling legislatures, the governor's office, and even the courts. With him now were three of his chief lieutenants—men who knew all the underground avenues of approach to those whose influence or votes could be made to serve the purposes of their chieftain.

"It's goin' to be close—too damn close, I'm afraid," Julius Blake finally said as he pushed aside a sheaf of papers on his desk and swung his big heavy body around facing his lieutenants.

"But there's the Senate, chief—the boys can stop it over there——"

"And then there's the governor—Barry wouldn't approve it——"

With an impatient gesture, Julius Blake shut off his aides' comments. "That's not the question now," he declared. "It's got to be stopped in the House. We don't want the boys in the Senate to hafta stop it—we've got something else for them to do this session; and Barry's got all he can carry without havin' to veto their damn amendment."

Then, after a moment's pause, and with a gesture of dismissal, he said: "Now, you boys go out and get busy. See to it that our men are there in the mornin'—when they're needed. Some of 'em may want to duck out, but don't let 'em off—make 'em stand up to the rack."

Left alone, Julius Blake turned back to his desk, busied himself a few minutes with the reports that his lieutenants had left with him; then he got up, picked up his hat and cane, and walked over to the door through which his aides had just departed. That door opened into a narrow passageway which led, on the right, to a private stairway from the second to the ground floor. In this way, it was possible for persons who did not care to be identified as visitors to the anti headquarters to make their way to Blake's room without passing through the hotel lobby. On the left, the hall led into a large, high ceilinged room, known as the Green Walnut Parlor; the reception room of the anti organization during legislative sessions.

Closing and securely locking the door of his room

behind him, Julius Blake hesitated a moment as if undecided whether to descend to the street entrance or to turn the other way into the Green Walnut Room. In the end he went into the reception room. On the threshold he again paused, surveying the scene before him—a scene of boisterous conviviality, with the tinkle of frosted glasses and the click of poker chips punctuating the din of thick voices raised in ribald talk and laughter; in short, just such a scene as Julius Blake had seen there on many similar legislative occasions.

A slight hush was occasioned by his entrance. Julius Blake seldom appeared on an occasion of this kind. It was his policy, and a very effective detail of his strategy, to remain in the background, in a sort of mysterious seclusion that had the effect of enhancing his power and prestige.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” he said affably, addressing the score of men—eight or ten legislators and a heterogeneous admixture of politicians of varying degrees of prominence. And then, with the gesture of royalty disclaiming its due, he protested, “No, no; don’t get up—don’t let me disturb your recreation. I just dropped in for a minute to see how you are getting along. I know you need rest and recreation after the strenuous work of today’s session—and for the work tomorrow, eh, senator?” he added with a broad smile, addressing a member of the Upper House who sat at a poker table near the door.

A general laugh—the sort of laugh that is royalty's due from its subjects—acknowledged that sally, and then the interrupted games and other diversions were resumed.

At a table in the far end of the room were Paul Wesley, Tom Hilton, Senator Ward and two of Julius Blake's lieutenants. Senator Ward was officially a dry. In his campaigns for office he was most eloquently and fervently dry, but in Austin was one of the wettest of the wets; a frequent visitor in the Green Walnut Room—via the back stairway. Paul Wesley and his two colleagues were winning consistently—only the two anti organization lieutenants were experiencing a run of bad luck. On the eve of the decisive struggle in the House, the anti organization was liberal.

Paul Wesley knew why the poker chips—white, red and blue stacks—were piling up in front of him. He knew that with every pot he was permitted to take he was placing himself under obligation to the anti organization—an obligation that he would be expected to redeem tomorrow with his vote. But, after all, he thought hazily, weakly extenuating his conduct, what did it matter? It was not as if his vote was being influenced by those blue poker chips—as if he were actually being bribed to vote “No” on the amendment. He would vote that way anyway. He and Tom Hilton had talked it over a long time ago and agreed that it would be unwise and futile to try to legislate morals on the

people. No; he was for local option. If the people wanted prohibition, let them vote it by counties, as his county had done.

At last, making his patronly way around the big room, Julius Blake came to Paul Wesley's table and stopped beside Senator Ward's chair, watching the progress of the game.

"By the way, Colonel, the good ladies went after you pretty hard this afternoon, didn't they?" Senator Ward greeted him, referring to a great temperance parade that hundreds of women and children, wearing the white ribbon of the W. C. T. U., led by the ministers of the Austin churches, had staged that afternoon in favor of the prohibition amendment. Of the scores of banners carried in the parade, appealing to the legislature for a dry Texas, not a few had referred unmistakably and pointedly to Julius Blake, chief of the brewery hirelings.

A flare of anger and resentment was Julius Blake's response to the senator's jovial remark; and his big mottled cheeks quivered as he profanely denounced the prohibitionists for what he termed their unfair and unsportsmanlike tactics. "Draggin' the women and children into it, like the bunch of white-livered cowards they are," he stormed. "And those damn preachers—— The ranting hypocrites ought to be scourged back to their pulpits——"

That was as far as he got. At that point, Paul Wesley, with clenched fists, leaped to his feet. "Shut up,

you damned, dirty blackguard," he shouted. "Say another word, and I'll——"

His threat was drowned in the confusion. Chairs, suddenly shoved back from poker tables, were overturned and crashed to the floor. A dozen men were on their feet at once, crowding around Paul Wesley and Julius Blake; a dozen voices protested: "Stop that! Stop it! We can't afford to have a row up here."

And thrusting himself in front of Paul Wesley, Tom Hilton cautioned: "Here, here, Polk, this won't do! Come on, let's go home; you can't afford to start any trouble up here."

"All right; all right," Paul Wesley grudgingly agreed, swaying unsteadily on his feet. "But he's got to shut up first. I'm not goin' to stand for his talking about preachers—my father—— Here, take these! Take your dirty money!" he shouted, as he thrust Tom Hilton aside, stooped, picked up a handful of poker chips and hurled them full into the face of Julius Blake.

III

Long before the opening hour the next morning, every seat in the House galleries was filled; and when the speaker rapped for order hundreds of people stood in the tightly packed aisles, eagerly awaiting the final scene of the momentous struggle. In the House itself the scene was no less intense. Because of the importance of the issue at stake and the insistence of the leaders all the members were in their places, and most of the mem-

bers of the Upper House were also on the floor, watching the proceedings.

At last the closing arguments were finished, and the speaker arose, and announced: "The speaker lays before the House *House Joint Resolution Number One*—the clerk will read the resolution."

There was a brief moment of tense silence in the big legislative chamber and in the crowded galleries. Then the voice of the reading clerk boomed forth. "House Joint Resolution Number One—Be it resolved by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring——" And so, on and on, through the long document.

Paul Wesley came into the chamber just a few moments before the clerk began reading. He was intentionally late; he wished to miss the final debate and all of the caucusing and solicitation that would precede the final vote. Just inside the door Tom Hilton stopped him. "Forget that business last night, Polk," he earnestly admonished Paul Wesley. "Forget it, and stay with your friends this morning." As Paul Wesley vouchsafed no reply, but evinced a desire to push on past him, he continued, "Don't make a mistake this morning—vote right—stay with the organization. These prohibition fanatics can't do anything for you, even if they win, but our friends can—and they will, if you stay with them."

Paul Wesley made no reply, but with an impatient gesture shrugged aside the restraining hand that Tom Hilton had laid on his shoulder and went to his seat,

where, on an outside row near a window, he sat throughout the reading of the resolution, apparently oblivious of his surroundings.

"The question is on the adoption of the resolution," the speaker announced. "As many of you as favor the adoption of the resolution will, as your names are called, vote 'aye'; and those opposed will vote 'no.' The clerk will call the roll."

Then the clerk began calling the names of the one hundred and fifty members of the House.

"Adams—Adams of Atascosa."

"No."

"Adams of Hunt."

"Aye."

"Anderson—Anderson of Bowie."

"Aye."

In the House and in the galleries pencils checked off the votes. To submit the proposed amendment required one hundred votes, two-thirds of the entire membership of the House. So, now every vote was significant, and the leaders of the two factions carefully checked off the names on their tally sheets as the roll call proceeded. There were no changes in the line-up; the closely drawn lines were holding fast.

"Olsen."—The last of the O's, and thus far in the voting the amendment was two votes short of the required two-thirds.

"No."

Then came Parker, a dry; then Patterson of Crockett,

another dry; then, Patterson of Bexar, an anti; and then, Poage of Haskell, a local optionist, with an "aye" that brought the prohibitionists up to within eleven votes of the requisite majority.

"Polk."

There was no answer. Paul Wesley, turned halfway around in his seat, facing a window to the right and in front of him, appeared wholly oblivious of his immediate surroundings; and his eyes, in which was the far-off look of one whose thoughts were turned inward, were fixed upon the distant horizon, far to the north and west.

"Polk," the clerk called out again, louder; looking inquiringly toward Paul Wesley's desk. "Polk of Barton."

And again there was no response. With all eyes turned upon him, Paul Wesley sat silent and motionless, as if the questioning voice of the clerk had failed altogether to reach him. Anti leaders stirred uneasily, apprehensively. What, they wondered was the significance of his seeming reluctance to vote? Had that affair in the Green Walnut Room last night caused him to shift sides? Where was Tom Hilton—why hadn't he seen to it that that matter was straightened up?

Nor was the interest of the proponents of the resolution less intense. The Barton County representative's vote had been conceded to the antis. Was it possible that they were mistaken? A quick glance down the tally sheets revealed the decisiveness of that yet unre-

corded vote. Of the remaining votes they had ten certainly—but one short of the one hundred necessary to win—and all the others were as certainly anti. The issue would turn on the vote of the Barton County representative. Should he vote “no,” or even vote “present,” the amendment would be lost. But if he should vote “aye”——

The speaker rose, rapped sharply on the desk with the gavel, and in a voice that carried in its tone the portentousness of the occasion, asked:

“How does the gentleman from Barton vote?”

Then in a low, but firm, voice that carried into every corner of the expectant chamber, came the answer—an answer that was not so much a reply to the voice of the speaker as it was to the voice of one far out beyond the western horizon:

“I vote ‘aye’.”

CHAPTER 24

HIS OWN PEOPLE

I

TWO years had passed, when, one morning a few months after his graduation from the University Law School, Paul Wesley found a telegram waiting on his desk. The message was from his mother, informing him of the serious illness of his father and asking him to come home at once. In the meantime, his father had retired from active ministry, or rather he had been superannuated by the Conference. Few Methodist preachers ever voluntarily sought the superannuate relation; for them death in the harness was a far more desirable end of their work. Few of them could look forward to anything after retirement more hopeful than a weary, dragging period of inactivity, accentuated by the pinch of poverty. Not a few were left without even a home in which to spend their declining years. In that respect, however, Brother Polk was more fortunate than most superannuates. He at least had a home, a very modest one withal but his own, at Thurston, a little town in central Texas.

Taking the first train out, Paul Wesley reached Thurston that afternoon. His mother met him at the door, and after a few words of greeting led him into the room where his father was.

Paul Wesley walked over to the bed, took his father's hand. "Mighty sorry to come home and find you laid up," he said. He had been warned not to let his father know that he had been summoned. "But Mother tells me that the doctor says you are better this afternoon."

His father was glad to see him. A smile of welcome lighted his wan face. He attempted to reply, but Paul Wesley stopped him. "Mother says the doctor's orders are for you to be quiet for the present," he explained. "After a while we'll have a long talk; I've lots of things to tell you."

That night Paul Wesley sat up, relieving his mother. The patient was quiet, asleep most of the time; and there was little for him to do. It was only necessary for him to be close at hand whenever his father awoke and required attention. The light had been turned off, and the room was but dimly illuminated by the glow from the fireplace. The only sound that broke the silence was the ticking of the old family clock on the mantel. As he listened to that familiar sound, Paul Wesley felt as though he were back in one of the little parsonage homes of his childhood. Always, as far back as he could recall, the clock had occupied a prominent place in the front room of the parsonage. Whenever the family had moved on from charge to charge, it had gone along with them, carefully packed away to insure its safety. Now its itinerant life was over. Here it had finally come to rest; and now it was marking off the last hours, perhaps, of his father's earthly life.

That was a startling thought. Not until this moment had he fully realized that his father might be nearing the end of life. Never before had he thought of him as growing old. He had still thought of his father as he had known him in childhood. Nor did that time now seem remote. It seemed only a short time since he and his father had driven over the circuit together, making the rounds of the Sunday appointments, behind old Selim and Moscow.

Selim and Moscow and the big double buggy—he hadn't thought of them in a long time. Where, he wondered, were Selim and Moscow now? It was difficult to think of his father living here without his old buggy team. But so it was. Selim and Moscow had been left behind, on his father's last charge. In his retirement he would not be able to keep up the team; so he had reluctantly sold the horses. The new owner had promised to take good care of them, and to keep them together. Paul Wesley hoped that he had kept his word. In the wide territory over which they had traveled, there had been few, if any, buggy teams superior to Selim and Moscow. Standing more than sixteen hands in height, well-matched in both appearance and ability, they were able in an emergency to make seventy-five miles a day over the prairie roads of western Texas. Paul Wesley recalled his father's pride in the possession of that splendid team and his pleasure in hearing people speak admiringly of them. More than once he had heard him repeat the compli-

mentary remark of one of his church members, "Brother Polk is different from most preachers; he don't drive a scrub team like all our other preachers did."

Paul Wesley himself had felt just as much pride in the team as had the father. In fact, all the family had shared that pride. He recalled the time when the horses were named. They were colts then, growing up on the section of land his father had purchased when he had first moved out West. Naming them was an important matter, for they were to be the pastor's buggy team. A long list of names had been suggested and gravely considered before they settled on Selim and Moscow. And as if it had been but yesterday, he remembered the day when his father drove up in front of the parsonage in a big new double buggy, with Selim and Moscow hitched to it.

His father was away from home a great deal in those days. His circuits were large ones, and it had required many days out of each month for him to make the round, preaching on Sunday, visiting the folks, getting up the collections, and holding revivals. Selim and Moscow had been kept busy then. Two pictures crossed his mind. The first, of his father driving away to visit some remote point on his circuit; the second one, of his father's return. The second one was the more vivid of the two pictures. All of them, mother and children—from Paul Wesley down to the youngest—would be eagerly watching for Papa. And then, perhaps late

in the afternoon, they would catch a glimpse of Selim and Moscow, coming down the road in an easy swinging trot, in perfect time with each other, with their heads up as befitted the thoroughbreds they were. There was no need of checkrein on them, no need of whip. And his father had been glad to get back home. True, he had sometimes been rather stern in dealing with the children, unable to appreciate and sympathize fully with childish needs and desires, but there could be no mistaking his abiding love for home and family.

The fire had burned low. Paul Wesley got up and replenished it. Then, standing with his back to the fireplace, he looked around at the familiar details of the room. The room itself was new to him, but its contents were old. The bed in which his father lay, the bureau over there in the corner, that battered old wardrobe, the chairs—all of these he had known in other days. Like the old clock up there on the mantel, they had gone along with his family from place to place, experiencing all the vicissitudes of their itinerant lives. . . . On his right a half-open door led out into the hall, and through it he saw beneath the shaded hall light the dim outlines of an old bookcase. He walked softly across the room and out into the hall, and opened one of the glass doors that inclosed the four bookshelves.

For a moment he stood there, glancing over the familiar contents—discarded text books, some of which had belonged to him in his high school days and had

been handed on down to the younger children; Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Stanley's *In Darkest Africa*, Ridpath's *History of the World*; and the remnants of his father's professional library, including two volumes of *Sermons*, a *Hymnal*, the *Discipline*, McTyeire's *History of Methodism*, and a set of Clark's *Commentaries*.

It was the set of *Commentaries* that caught and held his attention. The books, large, leather-bound volumes, were expensive when his father purchased them. That purchase, Paul Wesley now thought, had probably been his father's only large expenditure of money for his own pleasure and profit! How carefully he had always packed them away, when the family made their annual or biennial move—each volume wrapped separately in paper to prevent its covers being rubbed and scarred. But now, like their owner, the books were old and superannuated, their leaves discolored and mildewed, their leather backs, in spite of the devoted care that had been taken to prevent it, worn and scarred. Selecting at random, he took from the shelf a volume, opened it, and began slowly turning the leaves. On almost every page there were marked passages and marginal notes. He tried to read the notes, but with little success, for they were old and blurred, and tears dimmed his eyes as he followed the familiar handwriting.

Paul Wesley did not need to ask why those old, out-of-date *Commentaries* were still there. He knew why.

Not for himself alone had his father bought those books; nor for his own use had he so carefully preserved them; but for that son, Paul Wesley, first in order, and, following him, the two younger boys, who might one day catch up the mantle of his father's ministry. . . . Once, Paul Wesley recalled, a young preacher had offered to buy the books. It was just before his father's superannuation, when he no longer needed the *Commentaries*, but he had refused to part with them. "No; perhaps some day one of my boys will want them," he had said in explanation of his refusal to sell the books. And that ambition was yet unrealized; nor was there now any likelihood of its ever being fulfilled. But that was how life had always dealt with his father. Unfulfilled ambitions had made up a large part of his life. Circumstances had given him little opportunity to consult his own pleasure. Long ago, far up in the Tennessee mountains, when he was but a lad he worked on his widowed mother's little farm so his younger brothers and sisters might attend school a few months each year. He himself, studied nights, hoping some day a way might open for him to go to Vanderbilt University to equip himself for his chosen work—the ministry. At last the day had come when the realization of his cherished ambition was within reach. It was at the close of his first year in the Conference. He had asked his presiding elder to recommend a year's leave of absence for him, and had already engaged a room in KISSAM Hall, the famous old Vanderbilt dormitory in

which some of the most distinguished preachers of Southern Methodism had lived during their student days.

But he was never to occupy that room. The presiding bishop at that year's Conference was one of the greatest figures in the early history of Texas Methodism, a man who without the aid of a college education had climbed to the highest rank in the church, and who, accordingly, minimized the importance of collegiate training. A knowledge of the common school branches and a thorough grounding in the Scriptures—and this, he declared would come from reading, study, and experience in the active ministry—constituted the essential equipment for the Methodist ministry. The bishop's field was a large one, and there was urgent need for additional laborers in it. So he urged the class of young men that had come up for orders that year to take up without delay the work for which they had been ordained. "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest," the venerable bishop eloquently exhorted them.

His challenge to immediate service was one that no consecrated young minister could well withstand. The request for a leave of absence was withdrawn. From that day on, year after year, Brother Polk had gone the round of missions, circuits, and, at best, half-stations, always hoping for, but never receiving, the promotion that his native ability and devotion to the cause merited, and which college training would have insured.

Paul Wesley knew something of what it had cost his father to give up his ambition to occupy a more prominent place in the church, to see the friends and associates of his early ministry go up in the Conference, leaving him behind. . . . But disappointments and unfulfilled ambitions had never, Paul Wesley proudly recalled, embittered his life, or robbed him of the rewards of his humble ministry. There was one occasion—a long time ago, but he would never forget it—when his father's faith and consecration had been strikingly revealed to him. It was a Sunday afternoon experience meeting, at the close of a great revival. One after the other, scores of Christian people, both old and young, had testified, recounting their intimate religious experiences. Then his father had spoken.

“. . . I have found that the rewards of consecrated service are all-sufficient; that they more than compensate for all the sacrifices one must make in the service of God. Once I was ambitious; I aspired to be a great preacher, to occupy a prominent place in the Master's vineyard; but all of that is behind me. Now I know that I shall never be called to serve on the heights—that it is my lot to fill the humbler posts of duty—and I am content; for I know that it is His will; and His grace compensates me for the loss of all earthly rewards.”

That was his father's faith. In that heroic faith, he had lived and worked, and in that spirit of consecration

he would finish the course, be the remainder of it ever so long or short.

Another expression of his father's faith and courage came back to him. This had been near the end of his active ministry. They were driving through the country one Sunday afternoon; and, speaking reminiscently, his father had said:

"It's true that at times it has been a hard struggle—hard work, with but little pay, and often difficult to make both ends meet to support and educate the children—but if it were possible to do so, I should be glad to go over the same road again. It has had its compensations; the good has always outweighed bad fortune."

—Would he ever be able, Paul Wesley wondered, to say that of his own life——? Suppose it should be given to him to go back over his boyhood life again. Would he have it changed? Once, the answer would have been "yes." He would not then have chosen to be the preacher's boy. But now he would not have it different from what it had been. True, there had been unpleasant experiences in his early life. There had even been bitterness. Sometimes he had known humiliation, because of the thoughtlessness of those among whom he had lived; often he had rebelled against the injustice and carping criticism that had fallen to the lot of his brothers and sisters, his mother and himself. But that had been only a small part of his life. Most

of it, in spite of petty criticism, thoughtlessly imposed injustices, and annoying restrictions, had been, after all, a pretty good sort of life.

Thinking of his boyish revolt against the conditions which his father's ministry had imposed upon him, Paul Wesley experienced a feeling of shame and regret. He wished that he might call back that part of his life and erase from it all complaint and rebellion—that which now appeared as an unjust criticism of his father. He realized now that he had always been proud of his father, proud of his unblemished life, of his sterling, uncompromising integrity.

Paul Wesley put the old book back on the shelf with its companions. Then he tried to open the desk that formed the base of the bookcase. Once there had been a knob on the door, but it had long since disappeared, lost somewhere on the long road the old bookcase had traveled to this place. Around the keyhole were marks and scratches, scars made by knife blades, scissors and shoe hooks inserted in it to pry open the door. Paul Wesley used the blade of a pen knife to open the desk. It was just as he had seen it many, many times before—those little pigeon holes and drawers, which had always been such convenient receptacles for childish treasures, filled with all sorts of odds and ends, letters, old papers, discarded toys, and books.

There, too, was his father's Bible. He picked it up and opened it. Worn and broken by time and usage it fell open flat in his hands. Thoughtfully he turned

the pages, noting the marked passages, the blurred and indistinct marginal notes. It seemed as though he could hear his father's voice pronouncing those familiar texts. He came to *Acts*, wherein was recorded the stirring account of Paul's miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus. Then he followed the course of the apostle from that day on down to the hour when, a prisoner in bonds, he stood before the great Roman magistrate, and boldly declared his faith in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Saint Paul was his father's most frequently quoted Biblical writer. His words, more than those of any other of the apostles, had given him texts for sermons. From Paul's letters to his brethren he had drawn much of his own faith, his messages of salvation by faith. In his day, Paul had dared to preach the whole gospel of Christ, refusing to soften its commands and requirements; and so had he, taking that great exemplar of a virile Christian faith as a leader, preached a robust gospel—a gospel of consecration, of faith, and hope.

That faith—his father's faith—he had rejected; having counted the cost and found himself unable to pay the price. . . . He wondered if he had made a mistake. It was a serious thing to reject the faith of one's father—a faith that had stood the test of a lifetime of service!

Paul Wesley was strangely reluctant to lay the old Book aside. It had been a long time since he had looked inside it. Never before, perhaps, had he read

it from choice. He recalled the Sunday afternoons when he had been required to stay in the house and read a number of chapters before going out to play with other boys. To complete the assignments as quickly as possible, he had located all the short chapters in the various Books. Once he had turned those prescribed readings to good account. The Sunday School superintendent had offered a prize, a five-dollar gold piece, to the pupil who should memorize the greatest number of verses. He had won it, memorizing verses on Sunday afternoon while his competitors were out playing. And how rich he had felt with that beautiful gold piece in his pocket!

From its place on the mantel the clock struck the hour — midnight — reminding him of his duty. He closed the Bible, replaced it in the desk, and stepped inside the room. His father was still asleep. He bent over him a moment, listening to the quiet regular breathing, and was convinced that all was well for the present. Turning to the fireplace, he stirred up the fire and put on fresh fuel. There was nothing more to do; so he went back to the desk, pulled up a chair, and again took up the Bible. He opened it at *Genesis*.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," he read. Then, following the line of marked passages, he read on and on, a verse here, a chapter there, his memory weaving into the Biblical narrative scenes and incidents of his childhood days. There was the beautiful story of Ruth. He read it all. After

that came *Samuel*—the dedication of the boy Samuel to the service of God. . . . One Christmas his father had given him a book—*Bible Stories for Children*. In it was the story of the little boy Samuel, whose devoted mother had lent him to the Lord. He remembered the picture that illustrated the story—the little boy kneeling on a pallet, in the house of the prophet, Eli, answering the Lord, “Speak; for thy servant heareth.” Paul Wesley recalled how sorry he had always felt for that little boy, shut up in the house of the old prophet, just waiting for the Lord to call him to be a preacher. His parents had wanted him to be a preacher, but they hadn’t lent him to the Lord and shut him up in the Temple, where he couldn’t get away and play with other little boys. *Jonah*—“Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah.” But Jonah didn’t want to preach the word; he ran away from the Lord, and got himself into trouble, and then he had had to preach after all! He wondered. . . .

Then from out the printed page, marked and underscored, there leaped forth the challenging words of Micah:

“And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

The question held him, challenging him to answer. “What doth the Lord require of *thee*?”

He went back to the beginning of the verse and read it again:

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

What doth He require of *thee*——

Not burnt offerings, nor thousands of rams, nor rivers of oil, not this or that requirement of priest or church; but simply what *He* hath shewed *thee* to be good——

II

The end came peacefully. Having, like Paul, kept the faith and finished the course, the old preacher responded to the call to "come up higher."

Just a short way from his little home was the church, a plain, unpretentious little building like those in which he had so often preached the Word. There his body was borne; and there, to pay a final tribute of love and respect, came sorrowing friends and neighbors, bringing flowers—simple, home-grown flowers, from their yards and gardens.

An old friend and comrade-in-arms conducted the burial service. In simple, yet eloquent words, he recounted the years of fruitful service his deceased brother had given to the church and to the advancement of God's Kingdom. It was the story of one who had been faithful to every trust committed to him, of one who had fought a good fight and for whom there was the promise of a crown of righteousness.

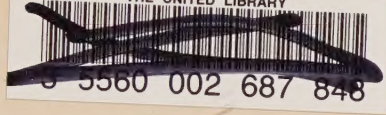
There was music, old familiar hymns of Christian faith and consolation; songs that had throughout the

years of his ministry strengthened the faith and inspired the heart of the old soldier of the cross in his battles for God and the right.

Paul Wesley, listening to the minister's kindly words and the consoling hymns and prayers, experienced a strange, new sense of peace. This church—his father's church—it was his church; and these people—his father's people—they were his people, too. They were not hostile, alien, as he had so often thought them to be; but friendly—his father's friends, and his friends. They were good folks, living up to the Light as it had been given to them to see it. And when, at the close of the service, he bent over the open casket to look for the last time upon the face of his father, now calm and reposeful in death, from out the depths of a new-found faith the preacher's boy softly whispered, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

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